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ABSTRACT

Smart Start is an early childhood initiative in North Carolina designed to build a statewide system of coordinated services for children from birth through age 5 and their families. At the heart of the program are 82 public-private nonprofit partnerships representing North Carolina's 100 counties, each sharing the mission of promoting school readiness with its own leadership and locally developed plans to fulfill the mission. This monograph details three examples of successful local Smart Start partnerships: (1) the Down East Partnership for Children; (2) the Randolph County Partnership for Children; and (3) the Region A Partnership for Children. Accounts are based on numerous interviews with parents, staff, local leaders, and caregivers and highlights the diversity among the local partnerships and their strategies. Following an overview of the Smart Start initiative and its impact on North Carolina's children and families, the monograph describes each of the partnerships. Each description focuses on the creation of systems change, the lessons learned, and the partnership accomplishments. The monograph concludes by noting that despite the partnerships' diversity in terms of geography, resources, history, culture, and approach, there are key components essential to their success, including: (1) using a systemic approach; (2) articulating the connection between a change initiative for children and families and a positive future; (3) helping people see a personal connection between an initiative and what matters to them; (4) involving stakeholders; (5) building on strengths; and (6) hiring a leader who is a community problem-solver. (KB)

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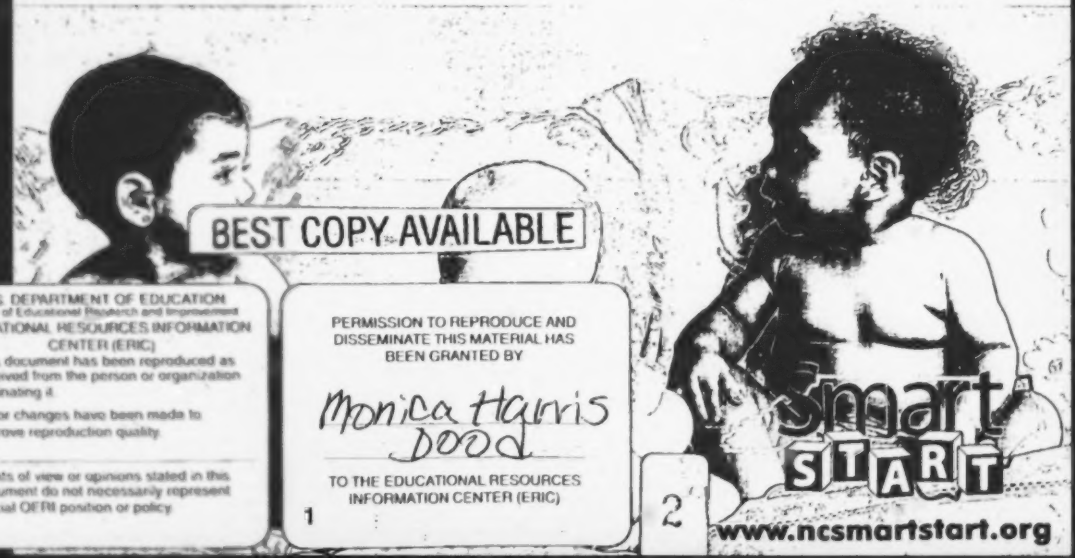
Smart Start in Action

Stories of Success from Three Communities

Three in a series of monographs about **Smart Start** published by the North Carolina Partnership for Children

by: Amy Laura Dombro



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  Edgecombe and Nash Counties (Down East Partnership for Children): Pat Allen, Bobbie Giles, Francis Harrison, Sylvia Harriss, Rusty Holderness, Marie Inscore, Linda Mann, Debra Pace, Theresa Shaw, Shelly Willingham, and Henrietta Zalkind.

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Amy Laura Dombro
April, 2002

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Introduction

Smart Start began as a bold experiment, under the leadership of Governor Jim Hunt, to build a statewide system of coordinated services where none existed for North Carolina's children from birth through age five, and their families. Its overall goal: to ensure all children in the state enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

At Smart Start's heart are 82 public-private non-profit partnerships representing all of North Carolina's 100 counties. These partnerships share the mission of promoting school readiness. Each has its own leadership and locally developed plans to fulfill the mission.

Across the state, Smart Start partnerships are successfully moving forward in their efforts to create positive change for children and families. To that end, we could easily have given you 82 different stories of how each local partnership evolved and responded to the unique issues in each of their regions of the state. To keep this monograph a manageable length, it will focus on three examples of local Smart Start partnerships, each with its own challenges and successes. Traveling from east to west across North Carolina they are: the Down East Partnership for Children, the Randolph County Partnership for Children and the Region A Partnership for Children.

Each of the three stories you are about to read is based on numerous interviews conducted during site visits. Partnership staff, local government, business, education, and religious leaders, heads of local health departments, mental health services and social services, as well as parents and caregivers shared their experiences with Smart Start. Thanks to their openness, we can offer you this behind-the-scenes look at how these three partnerships came into being and the factors that make each effective.

Karen Ponder, Executive Director of the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), the state-level nonprofit organization with oversight and administrative responsibility for Smart Start, explains, "Smart Start's success isn't a mystery. There's no better way to find this out than by hearing from people across the state who are making it work day in and day out. We hope by sharing some of their stories that you will find lessons learned to borrow, adapt, and build upon in your work to improve the lives of young children and families."

As you will see in these three examples, there is great diversity among each of the 82 local Smart Start partnerships and the strategies they have chosen to implement. There are also numerous commonalities that are essential to developing a successful community-based partnership—whether the region is rich or poor, rural or urban.

Each successful partnership:

- emphasized from the outset the need to identify resources, needs and a common vision for children and families;
- has a committed and strong executive director, staff and board of directors;
- builds on the strengths of individuals and its community;
- focuses on creating a system rather than providing a series of unconnected services;
- understands the vital on-going link between setting goals, planning, evaluation and accomplishments;
- appreciates that creating change takes time and can be "messy"; and
- moves ahead not always knowing where each step will lead but trusting they will find the way.

At the same time, each is uniquely shaped by such varied factors as community assets and needs, demographics, leadership style, politics, personalities, history—even by geography.

We'll start at the beginning with a brief overview of Smart Start. [1] Then turn our attention to the three stories of success.

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[1] This discussion is based on *What is Smart Start?* which is one in a series of monographs published by the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

What is Smart Start?

"Today, I am issuing a challenge to anyone who cares about our children and our future. Help us meet the needs of North Carolina's children. But help us do it in a new way, a better way." **- Gov. Jim Hunt, March 31, 1993**

Unlike many other states' efforts to improve the lives of young children and families by cutting and pasting together existing structures and services, Smart Start looked beyond "quick fixes" and created a new structure with state and local partners. The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) at the state level and local partnerships out in the counties are each private, non-profit 501 (c) (3) organizations with an executive director and Board of Directors.

"Smart Start is about wanting the best for all North Carolina's young children and families—those in child care and those who aren't. We're teaching people that a child's education begins at birth. We're creating a new way of doing business in a culture where children and families come first," says Karen Ponder, NCPC executive director.

"Smart Start is about local folks making decisions about what happens to the children and families in their own communities," adds Mary Jo Deck, Smart Start's first manager. "It offers a vehicle for creating services to meet the needs locally. It is about people believing they can make a difference in their communities."

Smart Start encourages people to dream, and they do. "We dream big," says one local Smart Start leader. "We're often without a road map and we sometimes get lost, but we're convinced the chance of succeeding is well worth the journey."

What Smart Start is and what it is not[2]

Smart Start is ....

- A community-based initiative to serve all North Carolina's children ages 0-5 and their families
- Taking a comprehensive approach to ensure that children enter school healthy and ready to succeed
- Providing activities in three major service areas: child care (affordability, accessibility, and quality), family support, and health
- Creating systemic change by bringing stakeholders to the table, building on existing services and filling in gaps as needed
- A public-private partnership at state and local levels

Smart Start is not ...

- A government program run out of Raleigh, NC or Washington, DC
- A single, easily defined intervention
- Aimed at only one population or one goal
- A clinical trial (there is no randomization)
- A quick fix

[2] Thanks to the FPG/UNC Smart Start evaluation team for this strategy of presenting a picture of Smart Start.

How does Smart Start work?

Smart Start local partnership boards assess the needs of children and families in their community as well as resources and services available to meet those needs. Based on this assessment, a comprehensive plan is developed to create a continuum of community-based services for children, ages 0-5. In each local partnership, planning teams make decisions about the kinds of programs that are developed using Smart Start funding and how to integrate existing resources with Smart Start funding.

NCPC board members, staff and state agency leaders review each local partnership's plan in depth. These stakeholders facilitate local efforts by identifying and coordinating available funding and other resources their agencies can offer. They also identify additional sources of funding, technical assistance and linkages that can help a county reach its goals.

As required by legislation, 30% of all Smart Start service funds are spent on child care subsidies. Other related services use 40% (e.g., child care resource and referral, quality improvement projects and teacher wage supplements) leaving 30% for health and family support activities.

Typically, local partnerships contract with existing human service agencies in their area to provide the services they plan and design. If there is no appropriate agency for a particular activity, the partnership may provide that activity itself.

What impact is Smart Start having on North Carolina's children and families?

Smart Start is making a tremendous impact on children, families and communities in North Carolina. Major findings from the evaluation being conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina and state data reveal that Smart Start:

Improves School Readiness

- Children who attend child care centers that are very involved in Smart Start quality improvement activities have better cognitive and language skills and fewer behavioral problems than children in centers not participating in Smart Start. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation, A Six-County Study of the Effects of Smart Start Child Care on Kindergarten Entry Skills)*

Improves the Quality of Child Care

- Family child care programs participating in Smart Start provide higher quality child care. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, Family Child Care in NC)*

- The percentage of high-quality child care centers has increased from 20% in 1993 to 66% in 2001. The percentage of poor-quality child care centers has decreased from 80% in 1993 to 34% in 2001. *(NC Division of Child Development data)*

- The quality of center-based care in NC has improved significantly over time because of Smart Start. Child care centers participating in more Smart

Start quality improvement activities provide higher quality care. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, The Effects of Smart Start on the Quality of Child Care)*

Improves Access to High Quality Child Care for All Families

- Since 1993, the quantity of high-quality child care centers in North Carolina has risen 283%—from 576 centers in 1993 to 2,210 in 2001. (NC Division of Child Development data)

- Since 1993, Smart Start programs created 56,455 additional child care spaces for working families. (Smart Start quarterly report data)

- More than 155,000 working families have received financial assistance to cover part of the costs of child care since Smart Start began in 1993. (Smart Start quarterly report data)

Supports Children with Special Needs

- Children with special needs are more likely to be in higher quality child care because of Smart Start. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, The Effects of Smart Start on Young Children with Disabilities and their Families, 1996)*

- From 1994 to 1999, the number of child care facilities enrolling children with special needs increased by 50% thanks to Smart Start training and resources. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, Smart Start and Quality Inclusive Child Care in NC, 2000)*

Improves Teacher Education

- In 2001, 83% of child care teachers had a college degree or received some college credits—compared to 41% in 1993. *(Child Care Services Association, 2002)*

Improves Child Care Teacher Retention

- In 1993, 42% of child care teachers left their classroom within one year. In 2001, 31% of child care teachers left their classroom within one year. *(Child Care Services Association, 2002)*

Improves Access to Children's Health Services

- Smart Start children are more likely to be immunized on time. In 2001, more than 50,000 children benefited from Smart Start immunization support services, compared to less than 8,800 in 1996. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, The Effect of Smart Start Health Interventions on Children's Health and Access to Care, 2001 and Smart Start quarterly report data)*

- Smart Start children are more likely to have a regular source of health care than children who are not involved in Smart Start. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, The Effect of Smart Start Health Interventions on Children's Health and Access to Care, 2001)*

- Non-Smart Start children are more likely to use an emergency department as their regular source of health care. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, The Effect of Smart Start Health Interventions on Children's Health and Access to Care, 2001)*

- The number of children who received Smart Start health and developmental screenings has tripled since 1996—increasing from 40,000 in 1996 to 120,000 in 2001. *(Smart Start quarterly report data)*

Provides Support to Families of Young Children

- Over 90% of families participating in Smart Start activities read to their child at least once a week. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, Families and the NC Smart Start Initiative)*

- In FY 2000-2001, more than 28,700 parents participated in Smart Start parenting classes, support groups and home visiting programs, compared to 14,651 in 1996. *(Smart Start quarterly report data)*

Improves the Economy of NC Communities

- Nearly $400 million has been added to the North Carolina economy through the creation of 56,455 additional child care spaces.

- Smart Start child care subsidies allow families to work, adding nearly $590 million to our state's economy.

Improves Collaboration and Coordination of Child and Family Services

- Smart Start has improved the coordination and effectiveness of local service agencies and programs that serve young children and their families. *(FPG/UNC Evaluation report, Collaboration: A Smart Start Success, 2001)*

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Three Stories of Success

Systems Change is defined as a "revision of the ways that people and institutions think, behave, and use their resources to affect fundamentally the types, quality and degree of service delivery to children and families." This change is achieved through "the commitment of resources and willingness to alter existing policies" and when partners "share a vision, establish common goals and agree to use their power to achieve them." The participation of children and families served by these systems is essential to its reinvention." [3] - *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services*, 1993

Each of the local Smart Start partnerships you are going to read about is creating systems change. How each goes about it is a fascinating story still in process yet rich in accomplishments and lessons to share.

We begin with the Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC), which was incorporated in 1993 to serve the children and families of Edgecombe and Nash counties—three months after not being selected as one of the first Smart Start partnerships. DEPC was going to exist with or without Smart Start. The next year, it was chosen to become part of Smart Start. DEPC thrives though the counties it serves are literally divided by a railroad track into black and white, have-nots and haves. After 20 years of tension, people in both counties were ready for a change. Smart Start and DEPC gave the two counties the opportunity to work together and turn a history of negativity into a future of promise for children and families.

Next we'll visit Randolph County, located in the geographical center of North Carolina. There was resistance in this largely Republican county to embrace what was seen as just another government program—one started by a Democratic governor at that. But once county leaders recognized that Smart Start was unique in its potential to create change at a local level, they moved ahead and incorporated a partnership in July, 1999. The last Smart Start partnership to come on board, Randolph County has found its voice for children in a remarkably short time.

Our last stop will be the Region A Partnership for Children. Region A consists of North Carolina's seven westernmost counties plus the Qualla Boundary, home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Surrounded by the Smoky Mountains on the north and Georgia on the south and located 300 miles from the state capital of Raleigh, the counties of Region A have a long history of depending on one another and working together. A place where people are proud and independent, Region A, one of the first Smart Start partnerships, is creating a system of care for young children that continues to grow and unfold.

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[3] Taken from Melaville, A.I., Blank, M.J. & Asayesh, G. (1993). *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Down East Partnership for Children

Key Moments In Down East Partnership for Children's Planning and Success, 1991-2001

1991

- Fred Turnage, Mayor of Rocky Mount, along with Claude Mayo and J.O Thorne, Chairmen of the Nash and Edgecombe County Board of Commissioners, convene a meeting of citizens to determine their interest in and support for a community-wide strategic planning process.

1992

- With citizen encouragement, a 30-member steering committee is appointed to guide the strategic planning process.

1993

- *Vision 2000*, an environmental scan, is published by the Vision 2000 Steering Committee of the Nash-Edgecombe-Rocky Mount Strategic Planning Project.
- Rocky Mount is the first community in the nation to adopt and implement Common Ground, an initiative to improve relationships among and between people of different races.
- Governor Jim Hunt announces Smart Start.
- Smart Start applications are due.
- The Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC) is not selected as one of Smart Start's 12 "pioneer" partnerships.
- DEPC is incorporated as a non-profit organization to serve children and families in Edgecombe and Nash counties without a known source of continuing funding.
- DEPC receives its first funding from the North Carolina Division of Child Development to provide Child Care Resource and Referral Services to help families locate child care.

1994

- Henrietta Zalkind is hired as executive director.
- DEPC is selected to be a Smart Start partnership.

1995

- DEPC receives "Family Preservation Family Support" funding from the North Carolina Department of Human Resources. These funds help DEPC expand its services and programs to meet the needs of families with older children.
- The Community Fellows, an intensive 3-year training program for community leaders, is launched.

1996

- DEPC buys, renovates and moves into the DEPC Family Resource Center, the hub of a network of family resource centers across the two counties.

2000

- DEPC adopts its strategic plan for 2000-2005 with key benchmarks. These benchmarks provide a clear focus for DEPC's next five years.

The Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC) was incorporated in December 1993 just three months after learning it was not chosen to be one of the first Smart Start partnerships. Though they had no known sources for continued funding, board members were fueled by their tremendous commitment to improving the lives of children and families in Edgecombe and Nash counties. DEPC would exist with or without Smart Start.

In 1994, DEPC applied again and in September received word that it had been chosen to be a Smart Start Partnership. Today, Smart Start funding provides 80% of DEPC's operating budget. [4]

"There is a long history of negativity between Edgecombe and Nash counties," says Shelly Willingham, DEPC's Facilities Manager and currently a member of the State Legislature. "We're literally divided by a railroad track into black and white, have-nots and haves. After 20 years of fighting, people were ready for it to end. Smart Start required that we come together. It gave us the opportunity to talk about our differences— and to discover we had much more in common than we had ever imagined."

DEPC's offices are located in the DEPC Family Resource Center (FRC), a refurbished YWCA in Rocky Mount, a city straddling the line between Edgecombe and Nash counties. "With vision, our board saw that this building could be our core," Shelly Willingham continues.

Walk into the FRC and you are in good company. Every month about 1800 parents, caregivers, agency heads, and community leaders come to attend a meeting, parenting class, or family activity, to borrow some materials or equipment for a child care program or to get some information. It is very likely you will agree with Linda Mann, a parent and board member who says, "People come not only for events or information. They come because someone makes you feel important and welcome."

"People of both counties know this is a place they can come and be heard," says Shelly Willingham. "It is a neutral meeting place for people who at one time didn't talk to each other."

"We touch the lives of over 12,000 children each year," says Henrietta Zalkind, DEPC's Executive Director. "We're working hard here to create trusted, innovative, collaborative and family-friendly services within the structure of existing services. At DEPC, we see ourselves as a conduit of ideas and information. We serve as a catalyst, bringing new knowledge and resources to the community."

"We are creating a cultural shift about how people see and treat children across our counties. The message we want to convey is that we need to work together as a team, everyone in the community, to care for our children," says Theresa Shaw, Assistant Director.

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[4] DEPC receives funding from a variety of sources other than Smart Start. In December, 1993, DEPC received its first funding from the N.C. Div. of Child Development to provide Child Care Resource & Referral Services to help families locate child care. In 1995, DEPC received Family Preservation Family Support funding from the N.C. Dept. of Human Resources. These funding sources and many others have allowed DEPC to expand its services and programs to meet the needs of families with older children giving it a broader scope than other Smart Start partnerships. For the purpose of this monograph, we are focusing on DEPC and Smart Start.

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Getting Started: Looking to the future — Searching for common ground

The groundwork for DEPC's success was set in place when a group of citizens (including parents, teachers, school officials, representatives from human service agencies, business community, local government, and churches of Nash and Edgecombe counties) came together around two community-building activities: Vision 2000 and Common Ground. Though there was no planned connection between the two initiatives, many of the same people participated in both. They practiced dreaming and creating a vision for what could be. They learned to talk openly and relatively comfortably about race issues. Relationships formed. People learned to work together by doing so.

Vision 2000, a strategic planning process, began in August, 1991 when Rocky Mount, Nash and Edgecombe counties found themselves faced with many changes. These included an economy that had shifted from a base of cotton and tobacco to a manufacturing base, an increasingly urban population, the merging of four public school systems into two, a better-educated population, smaller family size, an increased number of people living alone, increased environmental regulation, and increasing property crimes.

In response, the Mayor of Rocky Mount, Fred Turnage, along with Claude Mayo and J.O. Thorne, Chairmen of the Boards of Commissioners of Nash and Edgecombe counties, respectively, convened a meeting of citizens who broadly represented communities within the two-county area to determine their interest and support for a community-wide strategic planning process. In January 1992, with encouragement from this group, the three leaders announced the appointment of a 30-member steering committee to guide the Vision 2000 process.

There were two main purposes:

- to improve the choices that the community would be making as changes occurred leading into the next century; and
- to develop a process of sharing visions and values and forging area-wide consensus over the goals for the two-county area.

The main steps of the process included:

- scanning the environment to identify key factors and trends important to the future of the area and assess the area's strengths and weaknesses;
- selecting key issues for analysis in greater depth by task forces appointed to study each issue individually; and
- developing strategies for addressing changes and achieving the future envisioned.

Serious concerns for the health, education, safety and security of children in Nash and Edgecombe counties were uncovered. To the surprise of many, both counties shared many similar needs. Community leaders began to see that a regional effort to improve the lives of children and families would be more effective than each county working on its own. In fact, Edgecombe County's more serious circumstances could be an "advantage" when looking for funding based on need.

Common Ground came to Rocky Mount in 1993 courtesy of the Chamber of Com-

merce. It was the first community in the nation to adopt and implement this program created by the Faith and Politics Institute to bring about racial understanding and trust by providing information, spirit, training, and opportunities for interaction.

Common Ground brought citizens together through:

- a two-day strategy session on race relations that has since been replicated in other cities;
- promotion of minority business development;
- a Religion & Race group that brought together ministers from area churches; and
- Study Circles that provided a format for promoting dialogue in four 2-hour sessions aimed at discussing racism and race relations.

There was a vital link between these efforts and what was to come. Rusty Holderness, a community business leader and founding Board Chair of DEPC, explains: "Vision 2000 and Common Ground led a group of us to discover that we had more in common than most people ever imagined. They brought us together to think about the future of our two counties. When Smart Start came along, we could apply what we had done to the application process."

Henrietta Zalkind, DEPC's Executive Director, adds: "Especially here in the eastern part of the state, unless people are willing to put race and class on the table and have high expectations for *every child*, you are just throwing away money. Vision 2000 and Common Ground created awareness and skills that let us begin to really talk and work together in the best interests of all our children."

Applying for Smart Start: The first time

When Governor Hunt announced Smart Start in spring 1993, Rocky Mount had a planning team in place. The year before, Rusty Holderness had convened a group of people to help get a child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) up and going as part of an initiative supported by UP-LIFT (a nonprofit started in 1987 to promote the well-being of North Carolina's children, families, and communities). In addition, a second committee was exploring developing family resource centers.

Rusty Holderness and Henrietta Zalkind became the chairs of the Smart Start planning team. "We knew we had a better chance of succeeding if we went in as a two-county partnership. It wasn't easy, but that's what we did," remembers Rusty Holderness. "Life might be easier, but we wouldn't be as strong if we were just one county," adds Shelly Willingham.

DEPC applied for Smart Start funding with every other county in the state. Only twelve partnerships, encompassing 18 counties, were selected. DEPC was not among them.

After not getting Smart Start, Henrietta Zalkind and Rusty Holderness went to a lunch for the losers at the Governor's mansion. There they spoke with Dick Clifford, then director of the state's new Division of Child Development. He encouraged them to move ahead, incorporate, and get the CCR&R going. It would be good for the counties and might help DEPC be selected for Smart Start the following year. They took his advice. A lawyer friend of Henrietta's helped with the paperwork to incorporate. With $50,000

from the North Carolina Division of Child Development to provide resource and referral services to help families locate child care and providers, increase the quality of care they offer, and free space from the school department, DEPC was on its way.

"Looking back," says Henrietta Zalkind, "not getting Smart Start was one of the best things that could have happened to us. We took that next year to plan who we wanted to be—to create our vision, get our Board of Directors up and running and put an infrastructure into place. We knew DEPC was going to exist whether or not we got Smart Start funding. And we knew we would come back and try again."

Choosing the Right Leader: Hiring outside talent

When DEPC incorporated, Henrietta Zalkind, then the managing attorney in Rocky Mount's legal services office, was one of five members of the Board of Directors. An Executive Director was needed. As Rusty Holderness tells it, "We looked at Henrietta and said: 'You're it!' A few of us in business guaranteed her a salary until we came up with funding and she accepted."

"We purposely hired outside talent", explains Marie Inscore, a founding member and current Board Chair. "Having someone from outside the county was critical here. Henrietta wasn't beholden to anyone. She was a neutral person who could bring people together."

Henrietta brought her legal background. She also brought passion, vision and the ability to move an organization from A to B to C even as its path was evolving. "These qualities don't have to come in one person," according to Rusty Holderness. "We were just lucky that Henrietta had them."

Members of the board figured that Henrietta could eventually hire people with early childhood knowledge. They recognized that Henrietta's skills of seeing and building on what people have to offer, hiring good staff, articulating and holding people—including herself —to high expectations were what was needed for the fledgling organization.

"I knew from the start that the community holds the resources and knowledge we need to find answers," Zalkind explains. "My job was to bring people together and provide an environment so they could build on their strengths."

An Executive Director's Job Description

Henrietta Zalkind believes a partnership board's most important work is to hire the Executive Director. To do that, the board members need to be clear about what that job entails. "All too often," she says, "organizations are incredibly successful with their founding leader. Then someone else is hired, and within three to five years the organization folds. As part of our efforts to build capacity for sustainability, I worked hard to develop a job description that makes transparent and clarifies the characteristics and skills of a leader who can make change happen."

Primary Purpose

The Executive Director is the Chief Executive Officer of the Down East Partnership For Children and is responsible for the overall management of non-profit corporation's finances, programs and personnel. The Executive Director provides leadership in the development of the human and financial resources necessary to ensure that DEPC achieves its mission of improving the quality of life for children and families in Nash and Edgecombe counties through advocating and supporting quality, life-long education and facilitating a trusted and coordinated system of community services. DEPC directly provides or funds more than 30 local programs in the areas of child care, family resources, information/education and community collaboration. DEPC has an annual operating budget of approximately $5 million dollars and 35 staff members. The Executive Director reports directly to DEPC's 33 member Board of Directors.

Abilities Needed

Understanding of social and economic problems facing families and children of Nash and Edgecombe counties and a demonstrated commitment to addressing them
Strong understanding of the current human service delivery for NC children and families and diagnostic and evaluation skills necessary to make continuing systemic improvements
Clear vision for positive community change for children and families
Understanding the administrative and legislative process and how to impact public policy on behalf of children and families
Long term, strategic planning and evaluation skills
Ability to effectively utilize multiple processes and strategies in order to achieve positive, collaborative institutional and community change
Ability to lead a diverse team (in terms of race, class and geography) of board, staff, funded programs, community resources, and grassroots leaders towards a shared vision
Ability to delegate responsibility and authority
Ability to develop and maximize human resources
Understanding of diverse funding sources necessary for sustainability

Work Experience Requirements

At least 5 years experience in non-profit management and leadership.
Excellent supervision, coaching, facilitation, problem solving and conflict management experience
Strong collaboration experience
Experience managing activities on a relatively autonomous basis, with freedom to function with a wide range of independence and responsibility for results
3 years experience in financial administration, fund raising and non-profit organizational development
Success in obtaining grants
Experience working with diverse cultures
Experience with community and grassroots development
Work experience in dealing with legislature
Excellent written, oral and public communication skills
Computer literacy
Valid Driver's License
Some travel, evenings and weekend hours will be involved

An Executive Director's Job Description *(continued)*

Essential Responsibilities

Systems Change

Building and maintaining strong working relationships with partner organizations and agencies, and managing the local collaborative change process to ensure that all DEPC programs work together with other community resources to effectively accomplish the goals of the Partnership.

Working to increase local community leadership's capacity to deliver services to children and families, which have been locally designed and planned.

Actively advocating at the local, state and national levels for systemic improvements, which will support and enhance the development of children and families.

Program Development

Working with the DEPC Board of Directors to develop a strategic plan and agenda for the Partnership, which uses collaborative solutions to meet the needs of the children and families of Nash and Edgecombe counties.

Managing the program's work pursuant to the strategic plan.

Overseeing the development and evaluation of all DEPC programs and funded activities to maximize the quality and effectiveness of those services in achieving DEPC long-term goals.

Public Outreach and Engagement

Overseeing the development of an aggressive public education and awareness program about DEPC's goals and activities.

Acting as the chief spokesperson for DEPC.

Fund Development

Developing and implementing a comprehensive and diversified fund raising plan to sustain and support the work of the Partnership, including making applications and presentations to routine and new funding sources, and preparing reports to funding sources as required.

Financial Administration

Overseeing the finances of the organization including developing and managing the annual budget, supervising the financial administration of all DEPC funding to ensure fiscal accountability and adherence to DEPC's Accounting Policy and Procedures, and defining and executing all DEPC's contractual obligations, including subcontractors where appropriate.

Human Resources

Staffing quarterly Board meetings, implementing annual orientation and training for board members, and assisting in recruitment of new board members.

Hiring, supervision, evaluation, professional development and discipline of all Partnership staff in accordance with personnel policies adopted by the Board.

Developing and implementing a plan to utilize community volunteers to enhance the efforts of DEPC achieving its mission.

Education

Must possess at least a Master's Degree in Public Administration, Public Policy, Education or human service related field, or equivalent experience and education.

Physical Requirements

While performing this job the employee is: frequently required to sit; use hands to finger, handle or feel objects, tools or controls; reach with hands or arms; and talk or hear; periodically required to stand; walk, stoop, kneel; occasionally required to lift up to 25 pounds.

Specific vision abilities required by this job include: close vision and the ability to adjust focus to operate the computer.

The position also requires the ability to periodically work under time pressure.

Creating a Shared Vision and Mission

"Our vision and mission help us keep children and families at the center of all our decision-making," explains Marie Inscore, DEPC Board Chair. "Together with our constant efforts to cross economic and racial lines, the vision and mission are at the heart of everything we do. We have high expectations for every child in our two counties. We're going to come up together or sink together."

A vision is an ideal picture of what a community can achieve. DEPC has this vision for Edgecombe and Nash counties:

> *We believe that all children and their families when surrounded by a united and supportive community can reach their full potential.*

Its mission:

> *To improve the quality of life for children and families in Nash and Edgecombe counties through advocating and supporting quality, life long education and facilitating a trusted and coordinated system of community services.*

Henrietta Zalkind, like the other Executive Directors in these stories, sees herself as a holder and communicator of her organization's vision. She explains, "A vision needs to be tended and communicated in an ongoing way. Communicating our vision to our different partners is a big part of my job."

Applying for Smart Start: The second time

DEPC expanded its Board to include a broader group of stakeholders and began a strategic planning process as it prepared to reapply for Smart Start in 1994. Based on community needs, three committees were formed:

The *Child Care Resource and Referral Committee* was created to address the counties' low quality child care. To ensure a strong economic future for the community, quality, affordable child care was needed. It was also clear that early care and education needed to be connected to the schools. Children were starting school without the basics they needed to succeed and quality care would help them be better prepared.

Because good quality child care was not enough, the *Family Resources Committee* was created to support families. Its task: to consider how best to provide one-stop shopping in a community where lack of transportation was—and still is—a barrier to receiving needed services. The committee researched what was working in other places. Members learned about effective family resource centers being created in Kentucky. Groups of people from DEPC visited other local Smart Start partnerships where family resource centers were in the early stages of development. Consensus was built among board members and creating a network of local Family Resource Centers became part of DEPC's vision for the future.

"During this period," says Zalkind, "we realized the right hand often didn't know what the left hand was doing." To address this need, the *Information and Exchange Committee* (now Information and Support) was created to develop communication systems within the community so programs could work together, learn from best practices, and use evaluation to continually improve the quality of programs.

In September 1994, DEPC was selected to be a Smart Start partnership. "Being part of Smart Start has been the gas for the organizational engine that we had created," says Henrietta Zalkind.

DEPC's Evolving System of Programs and Services

"Our system is ever changing, organic, and involves an ongoing process of assessing needs and putting services in place to meet those needs," explains Zalkind. "We grow programs to meet needs. For example, due to an increasing number of Spanish-speaking families in Nash and Edgecombe counties, every effort is made today to provide services in both English and Spanish."

"Our way of being, our goals pull things together. Slowly the pieces are adding up to get where we want to get for our children and families," adds Theresa Shaw, DEPC Assistant Director. "It's all about building to a critical mass, reaching the tipping point where momentum builds and you one day realize you're on your way."

DEPC provides funding, technical assistance, and program and evaluation support to over 20 programs in a variety of partnering organizations. These include community-based family resource centers, a crisis ministry, libraries, school systems and health and social service departments. All programs must support DEPC's vision and mission and be working toward one or more of DEPC's goals:

- universal access to quality education;
- improved parenting and parent involvement in education;
- elimination of barriers to services; and/or
- improved transition to schools.

At the same time, DEPC itself provides many services. There were trust issues among agencies and many fledgling groups are just now getting established. As the neutral ground, DEPC ended up being a key service provider.

Each of the original planning committees is an arm of DEPC today. Each has expanded and now has staff to provide programs. Each has its individual purpose that is necessary to the organizational mission.

Providing so many services has led DEPC to a key juncture in its development. "People think we can do anything and want us to do everything simultaneously," says Zalkind. "That's just not possible." The partnership is now exploring how to further build the capacity of other organizations in the community to provide services. For example, its Community Fellows program was created to help build the capacity of grassroots organizations.

Programs and Services Offered by DEPC

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) has as its mission to address the need for universal access to quality education. Child Care Resource & Referral provides core services for:

Families by providing referrals to child care programs, conducting workshops on "choosing child care" and answering questions on child care regulation and quality issues.
The community by gathering statistics on child care in Nash and Edgecombe counties, operating a database of local child care options, increasing the awareness of quality child care, and working with businesses who are concerned about the effects of child care problems on the workforce.
Child care providers by offering support to new child care businesses, providing technical assistance to existing child care programs and sponsoring training and workshops on child care issues.

The other programmatic components of Child Care Resource & Referral include:

A Scholarship Program to help parents pay for high-quality child care.
A Lending Library, which has a variety of toys and educational materials for licensed child care teachers to check out.
Quality Improvement Initiatives to provide technical assistance to child care programs and facilities desiring to increase the quality of their programs.
School Age Care Initiatives to provide services to families, school-age care providers and the community to improve school-age care in Nash & Edgecombe counties.

The Family Resource Program (FRP) is operated within the partnership and coordinates a network of family resource centers in neighborhoods throughout Nash & Edgecombe counties. These centers provide families with young children a variety of services including health & education, child care, family literacy and parenting classes.

Serving as the hub of the network of family resource centers, the DEPC Family Resource Center functions as a training location for community organizations interested in providing quality early childhood education and family support services in their communities. The goal of the FRC is to help families and communities become self-sufficient, healthy & whole. Other components of the Family Resource Program include: **The Cooperative Play Program** which provides parenting and child development education using an indoor playspace and an outdoor playground and **Family Resource Specialists** who coordinate local parenting programs and help families with children access these services.

The Information & Support Program (I&S) coordinates a variety of services that provide information, training, technical assistance and support to the larger partnership including the funded programs, grassroots leaders and the community. I&S includes three components. The **Community Fellows Program** provides support and training for local grassroots leaders to help them build their capacity to serve children and families. The **Parent Information Center** (PIC) is an informal library where parents and professionals can learn more about parenting, child development, discipline, child care and education. The **Parent to Parent Program** coordinates a Parents as Partners mentoring program to support families who have a child with special needs, or who have lost a child. Examples of other DEPC funded programs and services in the community include:

WAGES Salary Supplements (Child Care Services Association) provides salary supplement to child care teachers based on education and length of employment;
Community Health Consortium (Edgecombe County Health Department) coordinates community-based health services for young children and their families;
Cedar Grove Elementary School provides Pre-K program for at-risk four year olds;
Edgecombe County Schools operates a school transition program including Parents as Teachers and home-school contacts that screen children and assist parents in finding available early care and education resources.

The Community Fellows Program

The Community Fellows program, created in 1995, is an intensive three-year training program for community leaders.

Its goal is to help more people in Nash and Edgecombe counties become capable leaders who:

Are dedicated to a vision for improving family support services in Nash and Edgecombe counties;
Encourage others to act on principles of quality family support services;
Connect families in Nash and Edgecombe counties to available family support services;
Influence the development and functioning of quality family support services;
Inspire grassroots people to participate in the development and functioning of family support services including DEPC; and
Are committed to personal growth, learning and renewal.

Participants focus on nine leadership areas:

The principles of family support;
Visioning;
Planning;
Group Dynamics;
Organizational development;
Communication;
Cultural flexibility;
Community building; and
Personal growth.

Activities include:

Workshops. These monthly two-hour sessions focus on topics such as the principles of family support, how to create effective visions and strategies, how change happens, useful strategies for building strong organizations, how to solve community problems and how to sustain a community initiative.
Potluck networking. Once a month, the Fellows gather to share a potluck dinner and to support each other by sharing stories of successes and challenges and problem-solving.
An annual retreat. On a weekend in June, the Fellows attend an overnight retreat to reflect on the past year, plan for the year ahead, and practice many of their new skills.
Coaching. The Community Fellows Coordinator meets with each Fellow at least three times during the program year to coach each Fellow in identifying their personal leadership strength and challenges and to craft a plan for learning. The coordinator also makes regular follow-up phone calls to each Fellow.
A portfolio. Each Fellow keeps a portfolio documenting what they have learned.

In the words of one participant: "The Community Fellows program taught me how to get things done - how to go to the source and follow through. I learned how to do my homework and to go to the right people and ask the right questions." "The work of DEPC will be able to continue over the years, thanks to new leadership created in the Community Fellows Program," explains Pat Allen, Information and Support Director, who serves on the program's Advisory Board.

Planning Strategically: Deciding where to focus

"People want a recipe for planning a system. But it doesn't work that way," explains Henrietta Zalkind. "We've built our system piece by piece—like kids building with blocks. When we see a piece we need, we add it. For example, when our data collected by the CCR&R showed we had lots of child care spaces but they were poor quality, we knew we didn't need to create new spaces but to enhance those we already had."

"Organizational development—communication, leadership, and trust building—are the basis of it all," adds Henrietta Zalkind. "If you don't have trusting relationships, it's like having a car without an engine."

In its first years, DEPC's vision, mission, and goals guided the development of programs. In 1998, when DEPC was five years old, it embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process. Its goals: to further increase DEPC's effectiveness and to implement a more in-depth evaluation process to systematically measure future accomplishments. This process was begun in November 1998 and was implemented in 2000. It will guide the organization's work over the next five years.

This process included the following steps:

- *Review and revise the partnership's values, vision, mission and goals* as necessary to reflect a clear picture of where the partnership is heading.
- *Reassess community needs*. This involved reviewing assessments completed by various community agencies, holding focus groups, assessing the needs of the growing Latino community, and conducting a post-Hurricane Floyd assessment.
- *Set priorities for funding programs*—new and continuing.
- *Develop objectives and benchmarks* to measure the partnership's progress toward reaching its goals.

Values of the Down East Partnership for Children

A value is a belief held precious; an internal guideline to tell right from wrong, just from unjust. Beliefs are held tightly, not changed by external forces.

Collaboration	Community	Empowerment
Vision	Tenacity	Creativity
Flexibility	Inclusivity	Evaluation
Diversity	Local control	Accountability
Quality	Acceptance	Optimism
Unity	Tolerance	Respect
Caring	Planning	Hearing others
		Public-private partnerships

DEPC's Goals and Objectives

(Note: Goals are ambitious statements of a desired end—what needs to be achieved in order to reach the vision for the community. Objectives are specific statements of what needs to be achieved.)

Goal 1: Universal access to quality education.
Working for the development of quality, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood education for all children and quality educational opportunities for all children and families. (This goal was originally limited to "access to high quality early childhood education" but now reflects a broader move toward quality education for all people, regardless of age.)

- More child care programs will achieve a higher quality rating.
- More child care teachers will be bilingual.
- The employee turnover rate will decrease in child care programs.
- More child care teachers will further their education.
- Assistance will be available to help families have access to affordable, high-quality child care.
- More child care will be available to meet the needs of all children (Latino, special needs, sick) and all families (weekend, drop-in, & third shift care).
- Salaries and benefits of child care teachers will increase to a more competitive level.
- Parents will have access to education about the availability and accessibility of quality early childhood education.
- Education will be increased to community businesses regarding the importance of quality early childhood education.

Goal 2: Improved parenting and parent involvement in education.
Working for the creation of an organized, accessible, family-friendly system of services that can help parents develop parenting skills and achieve success as parents. Encouraging parent's involvement in their child's education. (This goal has remained unchanged.)

- A coordinated continuum of parent education services will be available to all families.
- Parents will feel more competent about the parenting process.
- Parent involvement in education will increase.
- Coordinated, available and accessible family services (including information) will increase.

Goal 3: Elimination of barriers to services.
Working to develop a coordinated continuum of services for children and families that is readily available, easily accessible and family-friendly. Promoting collaboration between service agencies and organizations. (This goal has also remained unchanged.)

- Coordinated, available and accessible family services (including information through the use of best practices) will increase.
- Utilization of parent and family services will increase.
- Parents and families will utilize a coordinated network of Family Resource Centers.

Goal 4: Improve transition to school.
Working to establish for children and families a seamless, collaborative and organized transition process between home, early childhood education programs and the early school years. Encouraging the development of a coordinated system of early health services that will promote school readiness. (This goal was changed to broaden the scope of transition activities to meet the needs of all children entering school. It focuses on the transition to any school—public, private, or parochial.)

- The percentage of children entering kindergarten with undetected and untreated health and developmental conditions will be reduced.
- Parents will be active participants in their child's transition to school.
- The school's role in the home-to-school transition will be strengthened.
- The capacity for schools to serve kindergarten students at each child's unique level of developmental readiness (including special needs) will be increased.

Measuring Impact: An ongoing process that is constantly being refined

At the beginning, DEPC didn't have clear baseline data. Benchmarks were not part of the culture. Of course the partnership knew some basics, like how many child care centers had a higher rated license, the turnover rate, and child mortality, but there was so much to do, DEPC just jumped in and started problem-solving.

During its first years, DEPC's evaluation consisted largely of trying out ideas, then relying on experience, not hard data, to see if they worked. "We funded a lot of planning grants. We knew some things would work and some wouldn't," explains Henrietta Zalkind. "We were pushing the edge. We embarked on new initiatives knowing we would adjust what needed adjusting."

In addition, the partnership kept statistics. It tracked and communicated accomplishments in Top Ten lists that the community could easily understand.

Ten of DEPC's Top Accomplishments

1. The Child Care Resource & Referral Program was established in 1994, accredited in 1997 and reaccredited in 2000. In FY00-01, 566 parents were provided with resource and referral services and 560 teachers/directors were provided with teacher training, workshops or activities to increase license status.

2. The DEPC Family Resource Center (FRC) is the hub of a network of family resource centers. Approximately 1800 people per month visit the DEPC FRC to be involved in programming and planning including participation in a Parent Information Center, Lending Library for child care providers and Cooperative Play Program for parents. The FRC network includes the Bassett Center, OIC and Williford School FRC in Rocky Mount, Spaulding School FRC in Spring Hope and the Community Enrichment Organization and Princeville FRC in Princeville.

3. Two child care centers and eight family child care homes are nationally accredited. Three centers and fifteen homes are rated at the highest level by the state of NC.

4. The employee turnover rate decreased from a county-wide rate of 27% in Edgecombe County to 12% per year and 47% in Nash County to 16% in child care centers participating in the Salary Supplement project.

5. The Child Care Scholarship Program was established in 1995 to help parents who are working or in school pay for child care. To date, 1713 children ages birth to five have been served.

6. The Community Health Consortium was created to coordinate health services for young children. Health van provides on-site services. In FY00-01, 779 families received health related services, 161 children were assisted in finding a medical home and 337 children were assisted with getting the immunizations necessary for school attendance.

7. In 2001, received SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) planning grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to develop a two-county plan to transition 500 vulnerable children to school and ensure school success. The plan will be implemented over a five-year period beginning in 2003.

8. The Community Fellows Program, a grassroots leadership development program, was begun to help community leaders strengthen their ability to provide quality, family support services.

9. Developed a network of approximately 35 local organizations and agencies that have been working together to improve the quality of life for children and families in Edgecombe and Nash counties. In 1998, received the Smart Start statewide collaboration award.

10. Since 1994, over $15 million from outside resources has been put into the Edgecombe County and Nash County economies. These funds have leveraged millions of additional dollars.

A major shift occurred during the strategic planning process: DEPC went from collecting statistics and listing achievements to creating benchmarks that projected what could be accomplished in the future. "With the establishment of benchmarks," says Henrietta Zalkind, "we could begin our next five years with the end in mind."

Benchmarks will shape decisions for DEPC, helping prioritize and plan new work, evaluate progress, and make necessary improvements to achieve long-terms goals. In addition, the benchmarks will serve as a filter in determining which funding opportunities to pursue and which ones to let go.

In addition to benchmarks, DEPC continues to rely heavily on its culture of asking questions. As Theresa Shaw describes: "We constantly ask ourselves: Where are we going? Are we getting there? How can we do better?" Pat Allen adds, "We're a very self-aware organization willing to take a hard look, ask tough questions, and make changes when they need to be made."

"Our benchmarks will help us," says Henrietta Zalkind. "But they won't change our emphasis on relationships. Data gives you information, people problem-solve. Without relationships you don't have help to analyze data and move things forward."

Examples of Benchmarks

Benchmarks are specific steps toward achieving objectives that are specific steps toward achieving goals. Listed below are two examples of DEPC's objectives and benchmarks to reach its goal of universal access to quality education.

Objective	*2005 Benchmarks*
There will be more child care programs that achieve a higher quality rating.	50% of all child care centers will be rated with a NC 3-star license or above (on a 5-star scale) 5 child care centers will be nationally accredited 15 family child care homes will be nationally accredited 5 school-age child care programs will be nationally accredited
There will be more bilingual child care providers.	There will be a 5% increase in child care providers who are bilingual The employee turnover rate will decrease in child care programs The turnover rate of teachers in centers participating in DEPC activities will decrease by 3% each year over the next 5 years

Creating Public Awareness and Local Financial Support

In 1997, DEPC launched an ongoing public awareness and fund raising campaign called *For Every Child*. Directed toward local individuals, businesses, city and county governments, churches, organizations, and foundations, the campaign has three goals:

- to create awareness of children's needs;
- to teach people about DEPC's work and that DEPC is for everyone; and
- to create a general operating fund for the first time in DEPC's history.

Today the campaign finances a development office to work full time on bringing in more funds and provides monies that can be used flexibly during often tenuous grant renewal cycles.

DEPC underestimated how long such an effort would take. The campaign was interrupted when Hurricane Floyd slammed into Edgecombe and Nash Counties in September 1999. The subsequent flooding totally disrupted life in the entire area. DEPC spent several months serving as a distribution center and then coordinating various initiatives to continue flood relief and recovery. Staff had their hands full. Work on the campaign was set aside.

DEPC has now developed a multi-forum, on-going approach including:

- conducting focus groups in the community;
- conveying information in the newspaper and DEPC's newsletter;
- creating a group of "Champions" as advocates for children's issues, including business leaders, chamber of commerce staff, and child care providers, who can talk with individuals and organizations about providing political and financial support;
- setting up a Speaker's Bureau to address community groups about the state of children and DEPC's work;
- holding events such as "Lunch and Learn" with local Human Resources Directors and monthly "Family Nights Out" for the general public and for specific groups such as the school system or sheriff's department where families are invited to come for dinner, have fun with their children and learn about DEPC.

In the words of the campaign:

"Giving to DEPC is not as much a donation as it is an investment. The dollars we receive strengthen the Partnership's programs and initiatives that will help today's children become successful citizens—citizens who may one day be homeowners, employees in our local businesses, and taxpayers."

Ensuring Lasting Change

As DEPC moves ahead today, it is taking steps to ensure that the system it puts into place will last. These include:

- *Get buy-in.* As Theresa Shaw explains, "You have to bring everyone with you as you solve problems and create change—even if you get to where you are going a little slower or things don't end up the way you had thought."

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- *Creating a learning community.* DEPC has worked hard to create a learning community at DEPC. When it comes to making decisions, information is gathered and discussed until consensus is reached. An environment in which everyone is questioning and learning sets the stage for on-going growth and development.

- *Create and involve community leaders.* Bobbie Giles, a family child care provider and Community Fellow, has benefited from DEPC and Smart Start. In turn, she has helped others learn and grow. "I could not have become accredited and wouldn't be helping other providers today if it weren't for DEPC and Smart Start," she explains. "Smart Start paid 80% of my tuition, 50% of my books, and gave me a bonus through WAGE$. Now I tell people, 'Take a class that helps you. Once you do you'll want to learn more and more.' "

- *Being aware that pieces of your system are interrelated.* "You can think of a system like a mobile. When you pull on one piece, they all move. If you try to change too many things at one time, you end up with chaos. You won't know what's working and what's not. We've learned the hard way," shares Henrietta Zalkind, "that you can't do and change everything at once."

- *Building on others' experiences, their successes and their lessons learned.* DEPC makes a point of not working in isolation. As an example, when recently developing benchmarks, DEPC looked to other local partnerships that already had benchmarks in place.

And finally:

- *Hire a leader who is a community problem-solver. Be willing to pay for an experienced manager.* According to Henrietta Zalkind, "Creating change involves seizing opportunities, creating plans, checking how you are doing, going with the flow, facing battles, and determining how to keep on going when you lose. It isn't easy. It isn't neat. There are no simple answers no matter how hard we wish there were. But with skilled facilitation of a community problem solving process, it can be done."

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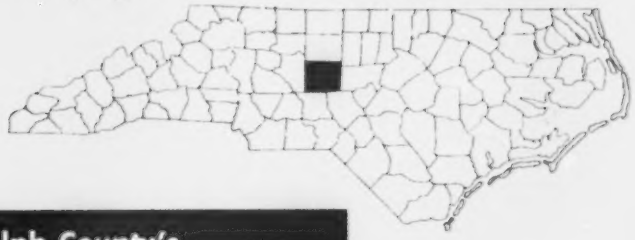
Randolph County Partnership for Children



Key Moments in Randolph County's Planning and Success, 1995-2001

1995

- Randolph County is offered Smart Start funding. The County Commissioners decline the funding.

1998-99

- Randolph County leaders explore with the Chatham County Partnership for Children the option of merging into a two-county partnership. During this process, they begin developing a plan for Randolph County and Pauline McKee is hired as a consultant to the process.

1999

- The two counties decide to remain independent.
- United Way of Randolph County receives a Success By 6® planning grant. The target area is the Town of Randleman.
- The Randolph County Partnership for Children officially incorporates. It is the last Smart Start partnership to be established.
- Randolph County Partnership for Children's first strategic plan is approved by the North Carolina Partnership for Children.
- Pauline McKee is hired to be executive director.
- The Partnership purchases a historical home in downtown Asheboro. It will provide offices and meeting space for Smart Start.

2000

- Randolph County Partnership for Children begins funding its first set of activities.
- The Randolph County Partnership for Children organizes a community retreat for the purpose of building a community vision for all of Randolph County's children. The retreat and following work sessions map out a path to shared results and establishes benchmarks with a specific focus on the county and local communities.
- United Way of Randolph County places Success By 6® under the umbrella of the Randolph County Partnership for Children.

Randolph County, located in the geographical center of North Carolina, is a largely Republican county of unique communities, some which date back to the early 1770s. It includes nine municipalities—Archdale, Asheboro, Franklinville, Liberty, Ramseur, Randleman, Seagrove, Staley, and Trinity—ranging in population from about 260 residents in Seagrove to almost 19,000 residents in the county seat, Asheboro. The county is also home to several smaller towns, each with its own distinct character.

Early settlers came looking for fertile land and a place to establish a community. In 1755, a group of settlers from Boston formed Sandy Creek Baptist Church, known today as the "mother church of the Southern Baptist Convention." In 1762, a group of Quakers from Philadelphia established the first Friends meeting and later formed an important hub of the Underground Railroad that led slaves to freedom. Today, Randolph County has more Friends Meetings than any other county in the state.

Most early industry consisted of farming, but by 1850, grist mills, sawmills, and cotton mills operating along the Deep River spawned further development. Visit today and you'll find a flourishing group of industries that produce a wide variety of products including furniture, plastics, tools, containers, hosiery, and batteries. The southern part of the county, near Seagrove, is home to more than 80 potteries where third, fourth, and fifth-generation potters are still using traditional methods.

This rich historical background and strong community spirit provide the roots for creating the Randolph County Partnership for Children and ultimately a county of communities focused on results for the county's youngest citizens and their families. "Each municipality has its own identity, its own mayor, its own Christmas parade, its own yearly traditions, be it a NASCAR festival or a pottery festival, and a strong sense of pride. It is a community planner's dream—if the planner is willing to promote local control," says Pauline McKee, Executive Director of the Randolph County Partnership for Children.

Even so, Smart Start was the last county in North Carolina to accept Smart Start funding and incorporate. Reid Pollard, CEO of Randolph Bank & Trust and the chair of the partnership board, explains: "We're a very conservative county and have been that way since the founding Quakers. A lot of people looked at Smart Start as a social program. Welfare's never been a real popular thing here." "We don't like to jump into something until we know where we are going," says Phil Kemp, Chairman of the Randolph County Commissioners.

Though late in getting started, the Randolph County Partnership has made tremendous strides in its first two years. "Once we made up our mind to go ahead, we've moved right along," says Phil Kemp.

Taking Time to Understand and Accept Smart Start

When Smart Start was first announced in North Carolina in 1993, Randolph County applied for funding with every other county in the state. It wasn't chosen.

"We didn't have a true sense of where we were going," explains Mimi Cooper, Director, Randolph County Health Department and founding chair of the board. "We didn't have a unified voice. Some people urged us to go for the money. Others warned that taking money we didn't know what to do with could lead to big trouble. We lacked a leader and so as it turned out, the money stayed in Raleigh until we were ready for it."

"In 1995, Smart Start's third year, we were offered funding along with eleven other counties," says Janice Scarborough, Executive Director of Regional Consolidated Services, a non-profit human service agency located in Asheboro, and a founding member of the board. "Our County Commissioners said, 'No.'"

"It became a Republican-Democrat thing," explains Phil Kemp. "We were offered funding but to accept it from a program started by a Democrat would have given constituents the wrong message. It would have been a coup for the governor. So we thought, why not let this thing settle a bit in case it didn't survive."

Janice Scarborough organized community partners to call the County Commissioners. "There were calls from the community, which I think surprised them," she says.

In light of the community support, the commissioners agreed to take the money if it would go to an existing non-profit like Regional Consolidated Services. But that wasn't possible. Smart Start legislation required that a separate entity, a neutral entity, be created to house each partnership. Why? Because Smart Start is all about creating a new way of doing business where young children and families are concerned. In the vast majority of cases, this is most effectively done through a newly developed, neutral organization that serves as the lead coordinating agency in the county or region on behalf of all young children.

Smart Start was viewed as just another government program. Why did it have to be housed in a brand new non-profit? Wasn't that just a waste of resources?

"Looking back," says Pauline McKee, "the leadership of Randolph voiced the same concerns many other counties had as well. It took years for people to understand that Smart Start was unique—and that creating a new organization enhanced its potential to create long lasting change for the better. It's a difficult concept." In the meantime, Smart Start funds were turned down again.

A year or so later, Mimi Cooper, along with Martha Sheriff, Director of Social Services, and Mazie Fleetwood, County Mental Health Director, went out to see what established partnerships were doing. "To our surprise, the Social Services, Health, and Mental Health Directors came back in support of Smart Start," says Phil Kemp. "They brought figures to County Commissioners' meetings that showed needs we didn't know about in our community."

Still, Randolph County resisted jumping in before it was ready. In 1998, Smart Start expanded statewide. Funding for planning and program development was provided to the 55 counties in the state that had yet to develop partnerships. Even then, as county leaders began meeting more regularly to discuss developing a Smart Start initiative, they did not hurry to spend the planning money allocated to them or to develop a plan for the program funds designated for Randolph County. In fact,

they returned most of the funds to Raleigh. As every other county in the state was moving toward developing a local initiative, leaders in Randolph County held steady and true to their own pace—one that has served the county well.

Deciding to Remain Independent and Incorporate

During its planning phase in 1998-99, Randolph County considered merging with another partnership: Chatham County. The two counties went through the planning process together. It became clear to leaders in Randolph County that a new, separate nonprofit was needed for Smart Start.

"This is when we met Pauline," says Mimi Cooper. "She was then consulting with partnerships across the state. We hired her to help us consider whether or not to join up with Chatham County. In the end, after careful thought and some initial joint planning, the two counties realized we were very different from one another and we agreed to call off the engagement."

The Randolph County Partnership for Children incorporated and gained nonprofit status in July 1999. "We might have been the last partnership," says Phil Kemp, " but now that we're up and running, we want to be the best, a model for everyone else."

"Looking back, it was good we took our time," continues Mimi Cooper. "We bonded, not around a specific issue but around children while we were driving back and forth to our meetings with Chatham County. We realized we were looking for someone to tell us where we should go and that was something we had to decide for ourselves. Smart Start gave us room to figure out what was best for Randolph County."

Following the decision to remain independent, the Randolph Partnership purchased a historical home in downtown Asheboro with ample office and meeting space. Central to the decision was the convenient location and easy access.

The Board also hired Pauline McKee as its executive director.

Choosing the Right Leader: A community decides

"I always wondered how in the world we could organize this thing," says Phil Kemp. "Pauline was here as a consultant when we got Smart Start. We knew from experience that she has great organizational skills and a special way of getting people involved. She can take things one small step at a time and get you where you want to go. When she decided to light here, we knew we were set to go."

"We had an opportunity to hire Pauline. She had terrific experience as well as a sense of the way things were done in Randolph County," says Mimi Cooper. "This was some of the first money we spent and it was spent well. Our activities and our name are in good hands."

"Pauline's originally from Chicago. Over time, she has become one of us," says Tommy McDonald, site team Chair of Success By 6® Randleman and a member of the Randolph County School Board.

Mimi Cooper pays Pauline one of the greatest compliments a leader can receive when she says, "I hope Pauline never leaves, but if she does, we'll be sad but fine. She's got us set up in a way we will last."

Making the Partnership the County's Voice for Children: Integrating Success By 6® with Smart Start

Success By 6®, United Way's national program to promote school readiness, was in its planning phase and targeted toward the town of Randleman. John Freeze, CEO of Commonwealth Hosiery and today a member of the local partnership board, helped launch that initiative. He explains, "We focused on mentoring to help children be ready for school. That's where our passion was. When the partnership was created, everyone knew we had duplicity of services. In my business, we would have just decided to merge. But non-profits have to create synergy and ownership. And so only after a series of laborious meetings that lasted two and three hours each, we decided to merge."

"It was a challenge," says Pauline McKee. "We could have had two groups doing the same thing, each requiring the same community partners on their boards, one focused on the whole county, the other on Randleman. The issue forced us to decide early on if Smart Start was about funding activities or becoming the county's voice for children. In the long run, all the time we spent at meetings and struggling with how to proceed was worth it."

The decision was made: The partnership is much more than a funding source. It has become a central place where people work together for the good of the county's children.

Janet Smith, Pre-School and Early Education Director of the First Baptist Church in Asheboro and a current board member, has seen this first hand. Her program originally took the state licensing exemption for faith-based child care programs. "When the partnership began, we were concerned about what it might mean for us," says Janet Smith. "Now, thanks to the partnership, we have a three-star child care license, are poised to achieve four-and five-stars (the highest rating) —and still use the curriculum that best reflects our own values." She has become a strong advocate for Smart Start. "I encourage colleagues in other faith-based centers to see the partnership as a shared resource for all of us that want to provide high-quality child care and services for children and families."

Dr. Diane Frost, Superintendent of the Asheboro City Schools and a member of the partnership board from the beginning, describes it this way: "The partnership is the convener for the county's plan for young children. When a preschool initiative came along, school leaders immediately responded that it should not be a separate initiative but part of their ongoing planning for young children through the partnership."

"In a short time, we've created ideas, momentum and found our voice for children," says Mimi Cooper. We're working together in a way we never did before. If Smart Start went out of business, we'd look somewhere else for funding. We would never want to go back to where we were before, with each of us doing an isolated piece."

Creating a Vision of Shared Results

In the spring of 2000, more than 30 representatives from all communities, walks of life, and personal backgrounds participated in a two-day retreat for the purpose of building a community vision for all of Randolph County's children.

Presentations, facilitated discussions, small group exercises, and plenty of time for one-on-one conversations were planned to help participants:

- Develop a deeper level of trust with one another;
- Understand a framework for creating large-scale community change;
- Make progress toward shared goals and accountability;
- Develop an understanding of the role of the partnership; and
- Improve skills for building and sustaining collaborations.

Three core results areas were articulated:

- All children enter school ready to succeed;
- All children are healthy; and
- Families are strong and stable.

To realize these results, the partnership identified three basic principles for creating communities where children and families thrive. Each is central to every decision

Creating a County of Communities Focused on Results

Vision: All children in Randolph County enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

Mission: The Randolph County Partnership for Children, a non-profit organization, is our community's lead organization to plan, identify, and fund programs and services for young children and their families. The Randolph County Partnership for Children:

- *Conducts research, facilitates county wide and community-specific planning, and allocates/ leverages funds to support programs which benefit young children 0-5 and their families.*
- *Is a catalyst for bringing together diverse sectors and interests to help develop solutions.*
- *Educates the community on the critical needs of young children and the importance of early education.*

The Partnership operates on three governing principles for creating a community where children and families thrive:

Focus on Results

- Shared agreement about results
- Public and private budgets reflect commitment to results
- Public and private data and reporting systems track progress over time

Build Family & Community Capacity

- Family and community engagement integral to all strategies
- Resources invested in community capacity building
- Community members and organizations ultimately engaged as partners in accountability and budget processes

Create Systems to Accelerate Learning

- Feedback systems focused on results, capacity building, and best practices
- Staff development focused on results, capacity building, and best practices
- Forums to share learnings across systems and between constituencies

and action made by the Randolph County Partnership:

- Focus on results;
- Build family and community capacity; and
- Create systems to accelerate learning.

"Our focus is on building local capacity, not on creating services," explains Pauline McKee. "The partnership's role in this county is to promote, support, and link programs in the local communities. We let agencies and individuals in communities know what Smart Start is and what it can do for them and for the county as a whole."

"It's easy to forget that things begin locally—in a community like Randleman with 2000 people. Each community in our county is a little village," says John Freeze. "The partnership gives guidance to village plans. Pauline and the others know how to pull them together and make a difference across the county. They can give guidance without squelching passion."

Tommy McDonald, a member of the county's school board, adds: "Pauline has the data. She can give us the big picture and help us decide where we want to go and how best to get there."

Building Family and Community Capacity: Creating a solid foundation for the future through strategic planning

Randolph County has followed a methodical path towards strategic planning since becoming a Smart Start partnership. "We've plodded along, asked lots of questions, looked long and hard at data and needs, identified gaps and figured out how best to meet them over the long term," says Dr. Diane Frost. "As Pauline reminds us, we're not doing 'flavor of the month'. It's so easy to get caught up trying to replicate the latest popular program or implement the latest curriculum. But not here. We take our time, come to an agreement about where we're going and once we agree, people roll up their sleeves and pitch in 100%."

An important part of the on-going planning strategy is to learn as much as possible about families and communities and to make decisions based on data, not assumptions. To this end, from its beginning, the partnership has channeled resources to fund studies and outreach projects designed to provide essential information about the county's children, parents, and child care providers:

- *The Child Care Workforce Study* determined the working conditions of county child care teachers;
- *The School Readiness Study* surveyed kindergarten teachers and identified school attendance areas with the highest percentage of children with delays and limited English proficiency and studied the characteristics of children identified as delayed;
- *The Community Outreach Project* spoke with parents to learn about the concerns and needs of the county's parents; and
- *The Child Care Resource and Referral Feasibility Study* resulted in a plan to establish a collaborative resource and referral program in the county.

Additionally, the community teams develop and collect community-specific data.

Community Outreach Project: Listening to and learning from parents

Not wanting to fund or initiate programs that parents do not need or want, the Partnership reached out to learn from parents. Through focus groups and one-on-one interviews with "hard-to-reach" and lower income families, the partnership has heard from more than 220 parents. Major themes that are emerging include:

Finding high quality, accessible, affordable child care is a struggle.

Families are juggling a large number of responsibilities. Parents feel pressured by competing demands on their time and often fail to care for themselves.

Parents want to develop their parenting skills, but are reluctant to do anything more that would take them away from their children.

Families desire connection and a sense of community.

Most families are unaware of support services available to them in the community.

Cleo Brooks, a parent of twins and a member of the board, has facilitated focus groups with fathers. "Lots of fathers out there feel disconnected from services they could use," he says. "People don't have time to call around lots of places for information. Many of the men I talked with had heard about Smart Start but think it is only for poor families. We're working on getting the word out—to fathers and mothers."

During its first planning year, partnership leaders decided to initiate only a few key program activities. Three core committees were formed: *Quality Child Care, Family Support,* and *Health.*

"We didn't ask people to tell us what they wanted to do at the start," says Mimi Cooper. "Instead we created activities, ones based on research, data, and best practices, and asked organizations, 'Can you do this?'"

These high impact, feasible activities that built on community strengths included:

- Providing salary supplements for child care teachers seeking further education through the WAGE$® program;
- Funding Randolph Community College to implement a Quality Improvement Plan on-site technical assistance project; (In the first year, more than 80% of centers in the county participated with assessments being conducted in more than 25 centers and 125 classrooms.)
- Expansion of child care scholarships through the local Department of Social Services, funding additional staff to help determine off-site eligibility and to improve payments to providers;
- Offering on-site screenings and technical assistance at child care centers and homes by funding the Health Department to implement a Child Care Health Consultation project;
- Making the Health Department's Family Care Program's Newborn Home Visits avail-

able to all county residents by funding two additional nurses; and

- Offering a one-time grant to all seven library branches for upgrading books and resources, including bilingual materials for children, parents, and child care teachers. (Using libraries, they were able to create mini-resource rooms throughout the county.)

Today, with its first programs underway and the first studies launched, the partnership has moved on to its second phase of strategic planning. This includes: examining the data as it emerges from studies; researching existing models and best practices to find proven strategies to meet the partnership's goals; and establishing relationships in the communities throughout the county. In addition to continuing and refining existing activities, the partnership has embarked on three new major initiatives:

1) Financing a Quality Child Care System. This initiative began with a pilot study to a) see if there was a need to supplement funds available to the child care system based on the figured "cost of quality" for each child and b) to provide technical assistance to help programs generate money and become more cost-effective before receiving any funds from Smart Start. The intent was to determine the actual costs associated with a higher star rating based on center size and ages of children served. The partnership did not want to jump in and pay quality bonuses per child for a specific star rating when none was needed. As a result of findings, payments for five-star centers will come from other sources than Smart Start. For example employers, and the partnership can now determine the next set of high .. impact activities to enhance quality.

2) The School Readiness Community-Based Initiative. In this project, a request for proposals was issued to organizations and groups located in municipalities with the highest percentage of children with delays entering schools. Communities had to identify a lead organization and commit to six to eight months in a strategic planning process to design a comprehensive early childhood initiative to meet the needs of these children. The process brought new participants to the table, including parents. Five community planning teams are currently implementing initiatives in their regions. Already, the community team process has resulted in the next wave of planning at the local level. For example, the Randleman/Level Cross/New Market community team has recognized the need for additional high-quality childcare. As a spin-off of the community team, a subcommittee of five Methodist ministers and representatives from their congregations has been formed to determine the feasibility of pooling their resources to construct a new five-star Methodist owned and operated child care center. To date, the school readiness initiative has brought more than 110 volunteers to the table to plan for the needs of young children at the local level. The process has resulted in more understanding and commitment to reaching county-wide benchmarks, and community-specific benchmarks have been incorporated into the partnership's overall strategic plan. An unintended but most welcome result has been the significant increase in relationships with churches, parents, small businesses and local newspapers and increased understanding of Smart Start in each small town.

3) A Collaborative Child Care Resource and Referral Program. "Child Care Resource and Referral is a difficult concept.

Often partnerships launch this program before there is real consensus and a shared understanding of what it should accomplish," says Pauline McKee. "We wanted a program that enhanced what was already underway in the county." Randolph's new program is located at a satellite office within walking distance of the partnership. Located in the office will be the Randolph Community College early childhood specialists, and a DSS eligibility caseworker will work there two days a week. Instead of creating a resource room, or a model classroom etc., the resource and referral program will use the seven library branches strategically located across the county and opened at hours convenient for parents and providers: e.g., evenings, Saturdays, etc. Existing classrooms with "real" children will be identified as "model" classrooms. Teachers in the classrooms will serve as mentors to other nearby teachers. Again, building community capacity was evident in this strategy.

Creating a Culture of Learning

"We do everything we can to promote learning among partnership staff and board members, families, and community leaders," says Pauline McKee. "Everything we do - gathering and analyzing data, planning activities - we do in a way to educate as many people as we can."

A community builds capacity

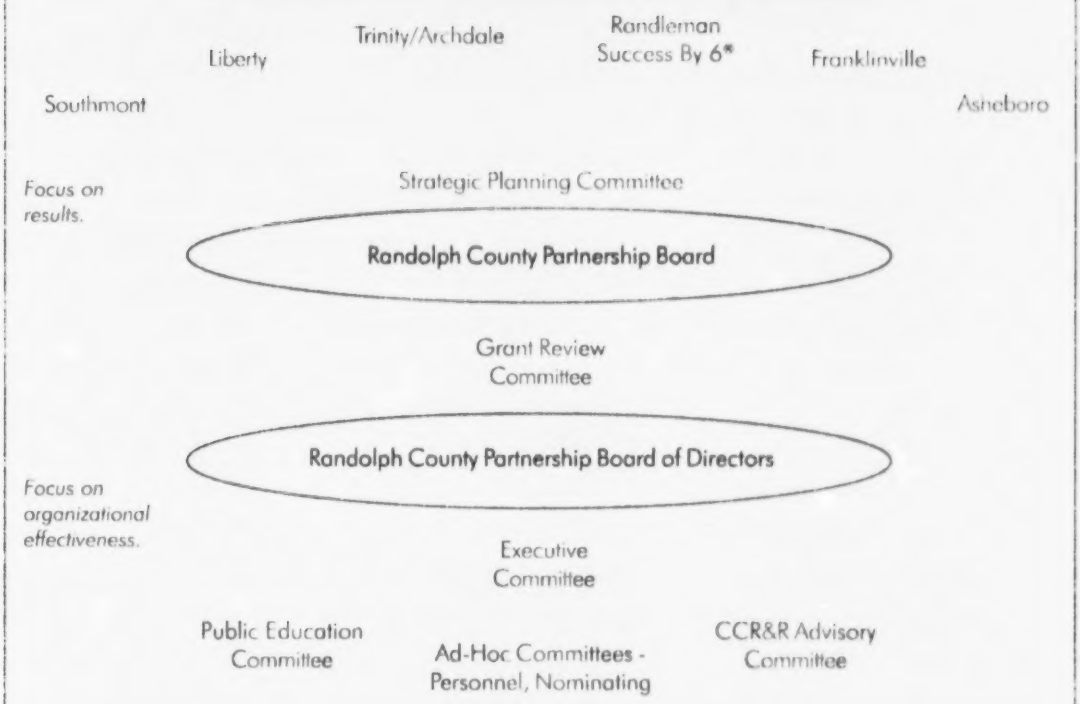
As part of the School Readiness Community-Based Initiative, the municipality of Liberty decided after a year of discussion to renovate the old Liberty school to be an early childhood center. They have started a program in existing space and are currently fundraising. Marissa Benton-Brown, Director of the Liberty Early Childhood Center and staff to the Celebrate Liberty's Children Community Planning Team, describes how the partnership supported the local group: "At the beginning, Tanya Beckerdite, the partnership program coordinator, and Pauline McKee came to facilitate every meeting. Even though they were there to help us, the ideas were ours. At the end of the first year, Pauline said to us, 'You have things in hand now'. She told us she'd always be available for technical assistance and stopped coming regularly to meetings. Thanks to her leadership and confidence in us, we have things in hand. We have lots of very hard work ahead of us—but we've learned a lot and we're on our way. We're doing what we know is best for our community."

Amazingly for such a new initiative, the planning for the School Readiness Community-Based Initiative has captured the interest of smaller communities that now want to learn and engage in a similar planning process. Volunteers who have participated on partnership issues committees and reside in these communities are applying their newly learned planning skills in their own communities and teaching their skills to others.

Maximizing the Chances of Success

In carefully thought out strategy to support the learning and developments of local communities, the partnership board structure provides for input from community planning teams.

Randolph County's Board Structure



Another effort that reflects the partnership's commitment to local communities is its "incubator model" for program development. This model ensures that issues raised by communities as well as board members will be addressed following a spelled out process designed to maximize chances for successful outcomes.

The "Incubator" Model: Randolph County's program development process

Randolph County's strategic planning process follows an "incubator" model:

Issues identified by the board that address significant community problems as well as unsolicited ideas and needs from the community are moved into issues committees called "incubators".

These committees of community stakeholders "incubate" the issues by studying identified needs, existing research, data from partnership studies, demographic models and best practices.

Recommendations from the "incubators" are studied thoroughly by the Grant Review Committee, which forwards its recommendations to the Executive Committee, and then makes final recommendations that are sent to the full Board of Directors.

Comprehensive programs that get at root causes, are multifaceted in approach, and that will produce long-term results are "hatched" or approved.

Program Development - The Process

Incubator Ideas/Issues
Issues identified by the Board or committees that address significant community problems, but which need further study. The Partnership moves these issues into "incubators" or issue committees where they are studied and may eventually "hatch" into enhanced or new programs or strategies.

FY 2001-02 Incubator Issues Include:
Expansion of high quality child care in areas of need, integration of education and training programs for child care providers, school readiness, child care resource and referral collaboration and adolescent pregnancy.

Unsolicited Proposals
Issues and ideas that come into the Partnership unsolicited but which may address a Partnership benchmark, or an emerging need or opportunity in the community.

Study Process
may include:

- Community Needs Assessment
- Focus Groups and Interviews
- Surveys
- Partnership Studies
- COG Data
- Frank Porter Graham Studies
- Child Care Work Force Study
- Model practices
- Resource Analysis
- Stakeholder Analysis

→

Issues Committees or Community planning teams

Business Representatives
Private Citizens
Library
Non-Profits
United Way
Mental Health
Cooperative Extension
Interagency Coordinating Council

Bringing Everyone to the Table

Dept. of Social Services
Parents
Churches
Head Start
Health Dept.
Community College
Child Care Providers
City & County Govt.

RCPC Grants Review Committee
↓
RCPC Executive Committee
↓
RCPC Board of Directors
↓
North Carolina Partnership for Children
↓
Randolph County Partnership for Children
↓
RCPC issue bids/selects agency to implement project

"It's Not Just About Money, It's About People Committed to Spending Money the Right Way"

"Our board doesn't act until we're ready—until the proper research has been done and we've thought about how we measure our impact. We ask ourselves two questions:

1) What do we want to affect?
2) What can we affect?

Then we carefully consider if our expenditure is going to buy the results we want," says Reid Pollard. "We've ended up giving money back to Smart Start and the United Way, so others can use it, rather than just spend it because we have it. Perhaps it is the Quaker influence at work."

Measuring Impact: Promoting learning through evaluation

"Ideally when you begin something like Smart Start," says Pauline McKee, "you want baseline data. But is it realistic? There's only so much time in a day, a month, a year. You just have to begin but as you begin, collect data, and keep collecting along the way. The more you get into it, the more you'll find what data you need. We've put considerable energy into collecting as much baseline data as possible and then identifying where the gaps are and how we might collect this information."

"We know change takes a long time, but as part of our ongoing assessment process, we want to see that things are working for children today. We only have these children for five years, and if we wait until they are five years old, we lose an entire cohort," adds Mimi Cooper.

Like the two other partnerships described in this monograph, the Randolph County Partnership for Children will continue to refine its evaluation process. Yet from the beginning it has been clear that measuring impact is integrated into all partnership planning and activities.

"In some organizations," says Pauline McKee, "people think of measuring impact as an isolated task—something to be done and then checked off the 'to do' list until next time. That's not how we see it here. We gather data regularly," she continues. "But rather than just analyze it and fill out a report for Raleigh, we use the data to promote our goals. We bring people in and look over the data for their projects together. As we do so, we discuss what is working and what isn't and how the partnership can best support them. We try to help people out in the communities see the connections between what they are doing and their results. For us, evaluation is part of the bigger picture of creating a culture of learning which is integral to improving the lives of children and families."

Randolph County's Issue/Community Team Planning Process

Evaluation and planning go hand-in-hand as Randolph County's core planning process shows.

CORE PLANNING PROCESS
(Issue Committee/Community Planning Team)

1. Step 1: Build the group
   Question: Who else needs to be at the table?

2. Step 2: Revisit the vision
   Question: What is our desired future?

3. Step 3: Assess the current reality
   Question: What is the current status of children and families in our community?
   Question: What are the driving forces responsible for this current reality?
   Question: Who is already engaged in helping children and families? What do they do? (needs and resources)

4. Step 4: Define priority results
   Question: What changes will make the most significant difference?
   Question: What changes will we hold ourselves accountable for achieving?

5. Step 5: Develop feedback system (indicators)
   Question: How will we know if we are achieving the changes we are committed to?

6. Step 6: Conduct stakeholder analysis
   Question: How can we increase the support for our plan?

7. Step 7: Develop/refine high leverage strategies (e.g., the program)
   Question: How will we create the change we seek?

8. Step 8: Detail action plan and implement
   Question: Who will do what by when?

9. Step 9: Get feedback and begin again
   Question: What is working? What isn't working?
   Question: What changes do we need to make to sustain our progress?

Sample Evaluation Report Form

"We think very carefully about how to help people think about evaluation in a way that helps them create and maintain quality programs. Our Evaluation Report form asks people not only to report what has happened but to think about and articulate challenges and strategies to overcome them," says Pauline McKee.

Outline for Mid-Year and Final Evaluation Reports

Name of Activity:
FY:
Report: (circle one) Mid-Year Final

Agency:
Contact Person:
Date:

Project Description: *Please briefly describe the activity and its purpose.*

Target Population: *Who is the intended service population?*

Who was served in FY ____? *Include demographics about the population served. Gender and race/ethnicity should be included. In some instances, geographic information or information about income status might be appropriate.*

Which services were provided in FY ____?

Using the expected outputs in the activity evaluation plan, please chart the progress of the activity in FY ____.

Expected Outputs	Actual Outputs (counts)

Using the expected outcomes in the activity evaluation plan, please chart the progress of the activity in FY ____. State the Outcome Status in terms of whether or not outcomes have been:

- Exceeded (documentation suggests the target has been surpassed)
- Achieved (documentation suggests the target has been met)
- Partially Achieved (some documented progress toward the outcome)
- Not Achieved (no documented progress towards the outcome)
- Unclear (If outcome is unclear, be sure to comment on barriers to determining the outcome status)

Expected Outcomes/Results	Actual Outcomes	Outcome Status

Evaluation Methods: Name and describe any instrument(s) used to determine stated outcomes. ****(Attach a blank copy of the instrument and any information regarding the manner in which the instrument is scored.)*

Findings:

Consumer Satisfaction: By which method(s) did the activity assess consumer satisfaction with services in FY _____? ****(Attach a blank copy of the instrument and any information regarding the manner in which the instrument is scored.)*

Collaborative Achievements: Please indicate collaborations that occurred in FY _____.

Challenges: *Please indicate the types of challenges that this activity has encountered in the FY. What steps have been taken to overcome these challenges? What still needs to be addressed?*

The Year Ahead: *Please* indicate any goals that the program has for the coming year. Also indicate any anticipated changes to service delivery or population served.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about this activity?

Gaining Credibility—Slowly but surely

"Independence is a big part of our county heritage. People don't want money from Raleigh—especially if it means giving up local decision-making," explains Reid Pollard. "As it turns out, we seem to have wide latitude as long as we can justify our results." Over time some of the opposition to Smart Start in Randolph County has aged out. And some opponents have been won over as the partnership has gained credibility. "The chair of the County Commissioners is now on our board. If we as a Smart Start Board can show we are having impact in small rural areas, our Commissioners will accept it."

Ensuring Lasting Change

As the Randolph County Partnership for Children moves ahead today, it is taking steps to ensure that the changes it puts in place will last. These include:

- *Give "process" the time and respect it deserves.* It took Randolph County time to see and truly understand that Smart Start is a new way of doing business. "It's a complicated concept, but once the light bulb went on, "says Pauline McKee, "things started moving and building momentum. Taking the time needed in the beginning has turned out to be an important gift."

- *Take a whole systems approach.* "In Randolph County, we see the connections between all of our pieces. For example, we continually take what we learn and use it to redirect our strategic planning. We see our work as alive and dynamic. It responds to the needs of children, families and our communities," says Pauline McKee.

- *See and articulate the connection between Smart Start and North Carolina's future.* Leaders in Randolph County see Smart Start not as an isolated initiative, but as a necessary ingredient for the successful future of the county and the state—a perception that ensures ongoing support from agencies and citizens of the county. "Young children are the future of our state," says Reid Pollard. "We need an educated workforce, and that begins when you start reading to a baby in the cradle. North Carolina is in the top eight of total spending for higher education and in the bottom five in spending for K-12. But why build a kingdom if you have no residents? Let's all agree we need to spend money on early education. Smart Start can be the key to improving education, the workforce, and quality of life in North Carolina."

- *Gain support at the community level where people deal with local problems everyday.* "Getting buy-in from rural groups that have distrust of the government and of outsiders is the key to our long term success and prosperity," explains Reid Pollard. "Pauline and the board are very sensitive to this and spend a lot of time reaching out." Kathy Vuncannon, President of the Randolph County Day Care Association, knows this is true from personal experience. "The partnership and Pauline are advocates of child care providers in Randolph County. As we've gotten to know them, we've learned they are there for us."

- *Turn evaluation into a learning tool.* Through its planning process and evaluation report forms, Randolph County clearly incorporates evaluation into the partnership's ongoing planning process. By shifting the focus from monitoring to learning, evaluation contributes to reaching the partnership's goal of creating a culture of learning.

And finally:

- *Avoid the limits of linear thinking. Trust the process.* Leaders in Randolph County have learned that community change does not follow a straight path. They have also learned to trust the process. For example, if they begin an initiative at point C because that's where there is consensus, they know the process will carry them back to point A or ahead to point G if that's what is needed. As another example, the partnership advertises for dream "employees" as a way of casting the net into the community and discovering the treasure of untapped resources. Most recently, they have discovered a skilled statistician and sociologist who has just moved into the county and are hiring her as a consultant to review and analyze data. "It's vital not to limit your thinking—or your dreaming," says Pauline McKee.

*****

Region A Partnership for Children

Key Moments in Region A Partnership for Children's Planning and Success, 1991-2002

1991-1993

- The Region A Child and Youth Planning Council began a two-year campaign— Our Children: Today and Tomorrow (OCTT). As part of this campaign, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted. Service providers, community leaders, parents—and children—were surveyed.

1993

- Governor Jim Hunt announces Smart Start.
- Smart Start applications are due. The seven counties of Region A join together and submit a joint application.
- Region A is selected as one of Smart Start's 12 "pioneer" partnerships and receives an initial allocation of $1,248,159 for January to June, 1994 and then $2,547,666 for FY 94-95 (July-June).

1993-1994

- The original planning team takes part in collaboration training offered to all partnerships. Members learn a new way of working together, which leads to the board working by consensus. Using consensus as the governance model for decision making is credited for many of the partnership's eventual accomplishments.
- The Region A Partnership for Children conducts its first strategic planning process and designs a plan for the years 1994-1999.

1994

- June T. Smith is hired to be Executive Director.

1999

- The Region A Partnership develops its second strategic plan over a six-month period. It covers the years 1999-2003.
- The partnership holds a regional celebration of its first five years.

2000

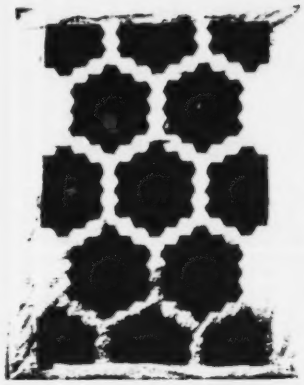
- The partnership purchases the Jenkins house in downtown Sylva as its permanent headquarters.

2001

- Region A paints a picture of the system of care for young children it is creating.

2002

- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation awards a SPARK planning grant to the partnership. The SPARK initiative will enable the Partnership to plan for strengthening regional systems to ensure school success for children who need additional support.



Region A consists of North Carolina's seven westernmost counties (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain) plus the Qualla Boundary, home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Hemmed in by the Smoky Mountains on the north and Georgia on the south, 300 miles from the state capital of Raleigh, it covers 3,116 square miles of rugged mountain terrain. Counties are connected by long, twisting roads. Unemployment and low wages are serious issues for families.

Gail Findlay, Director of the Fontana Regional Library, describes the area this way: "For all the beauty of our mountains and forests, it doesn't take but five minutes off a main highway to get into an economically depressed area. Here you don't see slums because we don't have the concentration of people. Also people here take care of their own. But the needs are there. Luckily we have lots of committed folks determined to bring the best to the folks who live out here."

Many of these committed folks work for and with Region A's Partnership for Children. Beginning its ninth year, the Partnership's offices are located in a brick house on the corner of Schulman and Jackson Streets in Sylva, North Carolina. Walk in. On the right you will find the receptionist's desk. Hanging on the wall to the left is a handmade quilt which is symbolic of the organization's vision of the system they are creating for young children and families.

"We have 11,000 children under the age of six in Region A. We are working hard here to create a system of care—for and with these children and their families," explains June T. Smith, Executive Director. "You can think of our system like the quilt hanging on our wall. The child is in the center. Together, we sew on pieces—some big, some little—fitting them together, filling in the holes, to keep the child warm, secure and nurtured. Our system is growing, unfolding over time as new pieces with different colors and shapes are added. Seven rural counties and the Qualla Boundary working alone could never have the resources to create and maintain the system that all of us working together are creating."

Getting Started: Collecting data and capturing the heart and soul of a community

The counties of Region A began working together long before Smart Start. "Perhaps this social change we are part of today with Smart Start began with the New Deal, if not before," muses Bill Gibson, a current and original board member of the partnership and Executive Director of the Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission. "We have definitely benefited here from being part of the Appalachian Regional Commission which started in the 60's. We received resources and perhaps more importantly, we began working together as a region."

In the 70's, the Region A Child and Youth Planning Council was formed as an advisory council to the Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission. Comprised of elected representatives from the region,

the Council's mission is to conduct needs assessments and to bring agencies together to talk, dream, and plan about what might be.

Council members originally came together around funding opportunities in the area of juvenile justice. No one county was big enough to apply for, let alone manage, a grant for starting up a group home for adjudicated youth. Together, though, the counties were successful in securing the funding they needed for a facility that is used by all of them.

In 1990, the Council sponsored a two-day conference on sexual abuse, which generated a tremendous amount of interest and dialogue across the region. When it was over, there were some funds left. Building on the conference's success, the council decided to put this money towards conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the critical needs of the region and to develop an action plan to meet those needs. Lee Crites, Chief Court Counselor of the Office of Juvenile Justice for the 30th Judicial District and chair of the Council at the time, and his wife, Marsha, a long-time community leader, spearheaded a two-year campaign, called *Our Children: Today and Tomorrow* (OCT&T).

There were two guiding principles:

- Parents and children are the best sources of information about their own needs; and
- The greater the diversity and grassroots participation in the project, the greater the community investment in taking action on identified needs.

"We wanted to do a quality needs assessment," explains Lee Crites. OCT&T made an insightful decision to learn from both consumers and children—an all-too-often overlooked source of valuable information. In another insightful decision, OCT&T realized it would need professional assistance and turned to faculty from Western Carolina University to help refine its survey instruments and analyze data.

Learning about the Community from the Community – Including the Children

The following steps were part of the OCTT needs assessment:

The Household Survey This survey was mailed to a random selection of parents of children in public schools. Parents were given a list of issues and asked to indicate if these issues a) described problems in their communities and b) if the problems existed in their own household. To ensure maximum involvement of the whole region, low-literacy and Spanish versions were designed.

The Search Institute Profile of Student Life Survey Students in grades seven, nine, and eleven were surveyed using a questionnaire developed by the Search Institute in Minnesota to measure indicators of strengths, called developmental assets, of the youth.

Service Provider Survey Surveys were sent to all regional service providers including libraries, schools, recreation centers, and health departments, to gather information about services provided as well as information on access and barriers to these services.

Key Informant Survey Community members knowledgeable about children and a group of community leaders were asked to name their three biggest concerns for the children in their community.

Town Meetings A trained group of 38 facilitators conducted town meetings in 12 locations across the region. Participants were asked for their opinions on community issues that influenced the lives of children. Responses were recorded on flip charts and included in the data analysis.

Children's Focus Groups Children ages nine to twelve, selected by county 4-H and extension agents, were asked about things going well in their lives and things needing improvement. Their responses too were recorded on chart paper, tape recorded, and later transcribed for data analysis.

Child View Over 100 people attended community tours of service locations across the region. Based on the Children's Defense Fund's Child Watch model, this activity allowed participants to visit problem sites and solution sites. Its goals: to raise awareness, create new leadership, and inspire action.

A retreat was held to interpret the data. Work groups then established priorities to be addressed. These included:

- *Early Childhood Education*: Addressing quality, extremely poor staff/child ratios and high staff turnover due to low wages.
- *Family Support Services*: Figuring out a way to guide families to and through services and to address the supply and quality of overall services. The need for such advocacy was compounded by a high illiteracy rate.
- *Health Care*: Providing primary health care resources for pregnant women and preschool children; and
- *Education*: Addressing the high number of children starting school with risk factors for success.

The findings were published in a widely distributed report titled: *Our Children: Today and Tomorrow*. "Going through this process, we not only captured data, but the heart and soul of our community," explains Lee Crites. "We created lots of energy out there. In addition to assessing needs, we set a goal of raising 25 cents per child in the region. We knew it wasn't much money but we wanted to get people involved. Fundraisers such as a

'kiss a pig contest' captured a lot of people's interest."

In the summer of 1993, Governor Jim Hunt announced Smart Start. Smart Start shared OCT&T's concern about children entering school with risk factors that interfered with their success. To reach Smart Start's goal of ensuring children arrive at school ready to succeed, OCT&T's issues in the areas of early care and education, family support, and health care would all need to be addressed. It was a match.

"We had no idea Smart Start was coming along in 1993," continues Lee Crites. "It was an unbelievable opportunity, and so we turned *Our Children Today and Tomorrow* plans into a Smart Start proposal." Marsha Crites tells of collating copies of the final OCT&T report on one end of their dining room table and the region's Smart Start proposal on the other end.

Region A clearly was in the right place at the right time.

Applying for Smart Start: A regional approach to improving the lives of children and families

A long history of collaboration and the OCT&T initiative demonstrated Region A's ability to look at the entire area and to yield local priorities for the benefit of the whole region. It showed the region could bring together diverse stakeholders—including families and children—to work together. Even so, it was not easy to hold the region together when it came to applying for Smart Start. Several counties wanted to try for Smart Start alone.

It took a small, strong, decisive core of leaders to hold things together. Bill Gibson, one of those leaders and Region A's chief coalition builder, shares the story of a key moment in Region A: "Soon after Smart Start was announced, a couple of our counties decided they would apply on their own. Lee Crites called and told me, 'We're going to lose it if we split up.' He was right. We knew there could only be one winner from our congressional district and that if we didn't hang together, Buncombe County would take it. And so I wrote a resolution that called for the seven counties to stick together, added signature blocks, got in my car and had it signed by the chairs of each county commission within 24 hours."

"We realized that by working together, individual counties could get more of what they wanted to improve things for children and their families," explains Lee Crites. "And we were right. We were chosen to be a pioneer partnership. Our vision of regional planning for westernmost North Carolina finally had a constant funding stream. We could see then that not only the children and families but their counties and the Qualla Boundary as well would be better off than if they had tried to go alone."

It hasn't always been easy. Gene Perrotta, current Region A Board Chair, explains, "Having more than one county means there are lots of things we have to work out. But it is worth it. We wouldn't be as strong if we were just one county. We have a larger resource pool to draw from in both human and financial resources. We have more ways to leverage additional resources. We've found strengths we didn't know we had. Region A has discovered there are greater options, opportunities and potential when people come together."

Choosing the Right Leader: Finding someone with 'people and business know-how'

At the beginning, the partnership looked for a leader with an early childhood background. When they did not find the right person in this area, they widened their search.

June T. Smith was hired based on her rich background that includes study of the humanities and 12 years of running her own business. She brings the partnership her management and business skills including hiring and building a staff, marketing, research, and public relations. She also has an openness to change, an ability to make connections between people and ideas, a willingness to go out on a limb and the commitment to do what is necessary to get things done.

Lee Crites reflects, "We needed someone with people and business know-how. Someone who was an expansive thinker. And someone who could keep moving ahead even when we weren't sure about where we were going to end up. June is that person." Bill Gibson adds, "June is the only person I know who had the courage to take the job."

Creating A Shared Vision and Mission

"A vision is a shared picture for what can be. Once a group has created a vision and people are willing to work to carry it through, you're on your way," says Lee Crites. June T. Smith adds, "When people come together with a common vision, they can choose to feel excited, hopeful—they aren't alone." If a vision grounds an initiative, a mission statement then describes how to bring a vision to life.

Creating a clear vision and mission and holding onto them over time has been a key ingredient to Region A's success. As part of the partnership's original planning process, the planning team created a vision of what it hopes Region A will look like after a generation of intensive focus on the needs of young children and families:

> *Witness the miracle ...*
> *a nurturing community ...*
> *a loving family ....*
> *a smiling child.*

With a focus toward turning this vision into reality, the Region A Board of Directors wrote a mission statement describing how counties, agencies, and individuals would work together:

> *The mission of the Region A Partnership for Children is to improve the quality of life for young children and families in western North Carolina by encouraging collaboration and funding services that focus on prevention and early intervention.*

Rather than see a need and meet a need in a helter-skelter fashion, having a vision and mission allows the people of Region A to keep the big picture of what they want to accomplish in view. It helps assure they will keep children and families at the center of all their decision-making and steps they take. Like the Executive Directors of the other partnerships in this monograph, June T. Smith serves as a vision-holder. It's her job to remind people of the mission—especially when the chips are down and individual counties, agencies and individuals begin to put their own needs and interests first.

Creating a Structure and Procedures: Making sure everyone is heard

Communication in Region A is a challenge. In addition to the region's vast area and winding mountain roads, there is not a single television station that serves the entire region. Most constituents of the Region A Partnership watch television that is broadcast from other states. Within the region, there are 12 different community newspapers. The 14 local radio stations are low wattage, often not penetrating far beyond the boundaries of the towns in which they are located.

It is little wonder that part of its success is the effort the partnership has made to put a structure and procedures in place to help assure that people feel heard.

There are local Smart Start teams in each county and on the Qualla Boundary that are comprised of the same categories of participation as is mandated for the partnership board. Agency personnel, parents of young children, child care providers, public school staff, government officials, and members of the faith community meet monthly to conduct ongoing planning within their locale. The eight team leaders plus four officers comprise the Executive Committee/Finance Committee of the partnership board. A partnership staff person attends all the local meetings to provide information and support. According to June T. Smith, "We depend on the continuous feedback from the county and boundary teams to inform the board of resource adjustments it needs to make during our four year planning cycles. Without this input, people at the local level would not feel very connected to the regional vision and mission. It is our original vision and mission we try to keep our eyes on rather than the interests of individual stakeholders."

At the partnership level, decisions of the board are made by consensus. "A 16 to 15 vote is not a win for anyone. We want win-win," says Gene Perotta, Board Chair. When an issue has to be decided, a show of hands is asked for: The first vote is of everyone who can consent to the motion on the floor. The second vote asks who can consent to the motion on the floor—even if it is not their first choice. If everyone's hand has not been raised at that point, the question is raised: "If you can't support this, what will it take to get your support?" Until everyone can leave the room with a commitment to support the action, nothing goes forward. It may sound cumbersome, and at times it is. But it works.

"Consensus takes time," says June T. Smith, "but it gets easier and faster over time. Governing by consensus is definitely a key to our success as a regional partnership. I cannot imagine having a successful partnership in an area as diverse and geographically vast as Region A with any other form of operating procedure."

Planning Strategically: Deciding where to focus

June T. Smith explains, "Our first year we developed a five year plan. In year four, we spent six months creating our second plan for the years 1999-2003. This ensures we have the big picture and can focus on our goals to meet over time. We are slowly but surely filling in the holes in our quilt. By setting priorities from the beginning, decisions can be made about what steps to take and monies assigned accordingly. When there are no priorities, monies can be pulled in different directions. The power is diluted and children and families feel less impact."

In the early years, decisions about how to proceed were informed by the region's experts.

Over time, the board has refined its decision-making process. Of course the region's experts are still looked to for insight and ideas. Every other year—in conjunction with the state-wide Smart Start funding cycle—requests for proposals (RFP's) are distributed. These are based on the region's strategic goals and outcomes (see below). Partnership staff hold workshops across the region on proposal writing. Agencies and organizations are invited to submit proposals for activities that meet one or more of these outcomes. Proposal ideas are shared across the region. "Sometimes seeing what someone else is proposing gives a county an idea they may not have had and allows them to submit a proposal as well or allows us to develop a regional proposal," says Howard Hill, Board Treasurer. The ideas are shared at local team meetings.

"We usually get requests for twice as much money as we have to allocate," says June T. Smith. It is up to members of the Grants Review Committee to recommend whom to fund and for how much. The Grants Review Committee is made up of one board member or a community partner from each county and the Qualla Boundary. The members may not belong to an agency that provides direct services. This eliminates any implied conflict of interest among committee members. The review process takes two eight-hour days. Applicants are allowed a 10-minute presentation before the committee if they desire.

Committee members base their decisions on the region's needs and resources, relevant research, guiding principles, and a series of questions. Decisions are made and submitted to the Executive Committee and then to the full board where they are usually approved at the first call for consensus.

An Example of Decision Making in the Early Years in Early Care and Education

"We relied 101% on Sheila Hoyle, Executive Director of Southwestern Child Development Commission (SWCDC), to help us decide how we could best improve the quality of early care and education," says June T. Smith. "Sheila brings a rare combination of hands-on know-how, experience and contacts from working in the state capital, and knowledge of research findings of factors associated with higher quality." Following Sheila's advice, the decision was made by the Board of Directors to initiate **Child Care Quality Enhancements**. Smart Start funds would be used to pay child care providers a 10% bonus over the market rate per subsidized child if they did one of the following:

Reduce the teacher-child ratio;
Reduce group size;
Send teachers to school;
Augment salaries;
Buy developmentally appropriate supplies and equipment; or
Improve a facility e.g., add a child-sized sink

Programs would receive a 20% enhancement per subsidized child if they were NAEYC accredited.

Though the enhancement was not enough to cover the fees lost when group size and ratios were reduced, child care providers were enthusiastic. "We were going crazy," many providers reported. "Life was chaos. By going smaller, everyone in our program was happier."

The results are in—and positive. In August 2001, when the new North Carolina Division of Child Development license rating scale of one to five stars had been in effect for only 11 months, 19.6% of Region A's child care centers had a five-star license rating (the highest) compared with 5.7% statewide. Among family child care homes, 3.8% had five stars compared with 2.5% statewide. Once again, Region A had a head start. The **Child Care Quality Enhancements** started a move toward quality upon which the star ratings could build. At the beginning of Smart Start, there were four programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the region. Today there are 22.

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Long Range Goals and Outcomes

Region A has identified four long range goals based on identified needs. The following goals have been in place since the Partnership's inception. They now have outcome measures that emerged from the last strategic planning process.

Goal 1: In Region A, all children from birth to five years of age will have access to high quality, affordable early care and education that addresses their individual needs.

Sub-Goal: Access and Affordability

Waiting list: Reduce the number of children on waiting lists for subsidized child care.

Expand eligibility: Increase the number of children served in expanded eligibility categories for subsidized care.

Slots: Increase the number of high quality, year-round child care slots available for infants and toddlers.

Cost: Ensure that no family pays more than 10% of its gross income for child care.

Sub-Goal: Quality and Professionalism

Turnover rate: Decrease the turnover rate for child care providers in Region A.

Higher licensure: Increase the number of children served in higher rated centers.

Education: Increase the number of providers with associate and 4-year degrees in early care and education.

Training: Increase the number of Region A child care providers who have affordable and local access to training for licensure and professional development.

Technical Assistance: Increase the number of Region A child care providers who implement new strategies as a result of technical assistance provided.

Substitute Pool: Increase the number of substitute child care providers who have been trained in a certificate program.

Wages: Increase the wages of the provider community to reduce turnover and provide continuity of care.

Sub-Goal: Capacity of Head Start to Serve Children

Capacity: Increase the capacity of Head Start to serve all eligible children.

Full-day and summer care: Increase the number of Head Start children who have access to extended day and summer care.

Goal 2: In Region A all children from birth to five years of age and their families will have access to a coordinated system of family-centered resource services which will focus on improving parenting skills, increasing mental health resources, and streamlining the process of accessing services.

Healthy Adult Development: Increase the number of parents of children 0-5 who complete parenting programs and show improvement in their knowledge of child development.

Healthy Child Development: Increase the number of previously unidentified behavioral and emotional challenges in the 0-5 population and initiate treatments.

Family Resource Centers: Increase the numbers of families with children 0-5 who use family resource centers to learn about services and get help in accessing services.

Goal 3: In Region A all children from birth to five years of age will have access to preventive health care and treatment to ensure they are healthy when they enter school.

Immunizations: Increase or maintain age appropriate immunization rates for each entity at 90% or higher.

Screenings: Increase number of previously unidentified vision, hearing, and developmental problems identified in the 0-5 population and initiate corrective actions.

Healthy Child and Adult Development: Increase the number of previously identified needs of families with newborns and initiate referrals.

Breastfeeding: Increase the percentage of mothers who continue to breastfeed 6 weeks postpartum.

Tooth Decay: Reduce the percent of children entering kindergarten with untreated tooth decay.

Goal 4: In Region A there is regional collaboration among public, private, and non-profit sector partners to build and maintain a comprehensive and integrated system of services for young children and their families.

Outreach: Increase outreach to parents to streamline their access to services, increase their knowledge of child development, and reduce stress in their lives.

Region A's System of Care: Building on research and best practice

From the beginning, the Region A Partnership for Children has relied on research-based and proven best practices to guide the planning and funding of initiatives. "We wanted our Smart Start dollars to go directly to serving children in a way we knew would get the results we were after," says June T. Smith. "We set out to build on the positive outcomes of well-researched programs from across the country. Our board was less interested in having those outcomes replicated through expensive evaluation than it was in seeing children's lives change."

With its Smart Start grant, the partnership has provided the funding to create a wide array of new services. It has also become the umbrella under which these services and others can be purposefully planned and coordinated. "The system of care we are trying to create is complex," explains June T. Smith. "It's made up of individuals, agencies, government mandates, many funding streams and different counties of different sizes each with their own agencies offering services. It took a few years of hard thinking and new financial resources for implementation, but we have finally come up with a system of care that is going a long way towards ensuring that all children are ready to succeed when they reach school."

Except for Head Start and some health screenings, both of which have been expanded through Smart Start, the services shown on this chart are all a result of Region A's vision and hard work supported by Smart Start funding, private donations, grant funding and in-kind support of partnership agencies.

Guiding Principles for Developing Services

We will develop services which:

- are customer/family driven and focused on quality
- are supported by the community
- are coordinated through comprehensive case management
- are delivered where people are (physically, intellectually, and emotionally)
- are based on what current research shows works
- create environments which support desired changes
- are preventive in focus
- are sensitive to race, culture, gender, individuals with disabilities and differing kinds of family structures (single parents, blended families, foster families, etc.)
- focus on empowering the family to become more self-sufficient and to access available services appropriately

Questions to Ask When Ranking Proposals or Strategies

In ranking proposals, we should ask the following questions: (Those with the most "yes" answers will be ranked more favorably)

- Does the research show this intervention to have a long-term impact on children and families? And, will it model effective program strategies?
- Does this intervention affect the whole system of care and services?
- Is this intervention likely to leverage other resources?
- Is it likely that ongoing funding for this intervention will be generated?
- Is it unlikely that other sources of funding will be available to do this work?
- Is this intervention an example of the best case practice in this area of work?

Descriptions of a few of the many services that have been developed in Region A since Smart Start

Early Care and Education

The primary strategy used by Region A to increase the number of high star ratings and thus high quality child care is the **Quality Enhancement Project,** previously described.

Teachers' education has always been a main focus in Region A's efforts to improve the quality of early care and education. The reason: research has shown that formal education and specialized training are significantly associated with higher quality child care. The **New Horizons Training Center** is a regional model National Association of Education of Young Children-accredited (NAEYC) demonstration site and is available to all Region A care providers for training and technical assistance. The Center utilizes distance learning capabilities via Community Link and the North Carolina Information Highway to increase access to training. Through **WAGE$**, child care teachers who remain in their program for six months receive a salary bonus based on their level of education. This lowers staff turnover while encouraging teachers to obtain more education.

In its **preschool initiative for four-year-olds**, Region A is creating a link between child care and the schools to work collaboratively to prepare children for kindergarten. In Macon County, Head Start has partnered with the public schools to launch a pre-school initiative because they have the existing infrastructure and the school system is still developing theirs. Theresa Mallonee, Executive Director of the Macon Program for Progress, explains, "Thanks to Smart Start, we have a new partner that is helping us serve the needs of some of our pre-K children—the public schools. The Pre-K Project serves eight Head Start children, and eight from the public schools. Head Start provides transportation and meals. The schools provide the space, teachers and materials." The partnership has also just received a **SPARK** grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to help leverage Smart Start funding and federal school funding to create a system of school readiness for vulnerable children. The grant provides for a year of planning to rediscover assets and build on them. The result will be a stronger support system for children and families as they transition into school.

For children not in child care and their caregivers, the region's two early learning specialists are assisting families in organizing **Community Early Learning Groups**. In these groups, children can experience a structured environment, do activities that address all the areas of school readiness, receive health and developmental screenings, and develop relationships with other children and adults. For parents or other caregivers, the groups provide opportunities to meet other families, learn how to link with schools, and get ideas of learning activities to try at home.

The Cherokee Language Project was created to prepare preschoolers for elementary and high school level Cherokee language instruction and to restore their language to the Cherokee people. "Culture is language," explains Eddie Bushyhead, Cherokee Language Project Coordinator. "You take the language away and you take away a people's spiritual connectedness." Every week, Eddie and the Early Education Cherokee Language Specialist visit up to 327 children in Qualla Boundary child care centers to instruct both the children and their teachers in the Cherokee language.

Family Support

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) across the region serve as the core of a coordinated system of consumer-driven, family-centered services. Services currently offered by FRCs include: referrals for child care needs, **Parents as Teachers** (a home visiting model for parent education), parent education classes, respite care, lending libraries that include books and equipment, play groups, and Parent Involvement Backpacks that contain activities for parents and providers to use with children. The activities are based on different educational themes including shape, color, and nutrition.

Infant massage is helping children with special needs across the region. Once again, Region A applied resources to a project based on research findings. Studies of children in orphanages, most recently in Romania, suggest an essential link between early positive touch and a child's normal development.

The Fontana Regional Library's **Reading Rover**, a bookmobile, took to the road in 1999. It travels an average of 800 miles per month, the longest run being 100 miles round trip and the biggest challenge being sharp banked turns in the road. Since that time, staff have provided more than 700 story programs for children and more than 300 workshop hours for teachers and parents in Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties and the Qualla Boundary. The **Haywood Library Outreach** brings similar library services to parents and providers in Haywood County.

Health

Research shows that vision problems left unchecked can lead to significant early learning problems. Based on this finding, **vision screenings** take place in each county today. Smart Start funding has been used to provide mobile units of Medical Technology & Innovations, Inc. (MTI) photo screeners. The MTI can detect nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism in children too young to recognize the letters on a standard examination chart. As a result, explains Lee Crites, "a problem was found in the vision of a six-month old. If it had been discovered three to six months later it would have been too late. This child would have lost his sight. And this is only one example of the power of Smart Start."

Because of **dental services** created with Smart Start funding, children across the region are having fluoride varnish applied to their teeth; Jackson County has put a tooth bus on the road; Clay, Cherokee, and Graham counties have received a federal grant to secure a tooth bus for that area; and two dental clinics have been opened.

When Smart Start nurses started **immunization tracking**, there was a 60-70% compliance rate at age two. It is now 95-98%. Smart Start nurses perform hearing and developmental screenings as well as the MTI screenings, provide health education to both children and their teachers, and serve as a resource to center directors in matters of health and safety. Nurses meet quarterly as a group to share information and best practices and to recommend additional health related activities needed in the region.

Witness the Miracle: A Nurturing Community, A Loving Family, A Smiling Child

School Readiness Begins Before Birth

Regional Screening
of Families of All Newborns

↓

Welcome Baby
Information and Referral

↙ ↓ ↘

Early Care & Education
- Quality Child Care (includes CCR&R, New Horizons Training Center, WAGE$ and center grants)
- Head Start Wrap Around
- Four-Year-Old Pre-schools
- Community Early Learning Groups

Family Support
- Family Resource Centers
- Haywood Library Outreach
- Parents as Teachers
- Healthy Families
- Child's Garden
- Infant Massage
- Reading Rover
- Respite Care

Health
- Screenings
- Dental Services
- Car Seat Safety
- Health Education
- Immunization Tracking
- Child Care Health Consultant
- Communication Disorders Specialist

↘ ↓ ↙

Transition to Kindergarten

↓

A Smiling Child Ready to Succeed

Seeing the Connections Within the System

"The next step we are facing is to help people working within our system see how what they are doing connects to what others are doing," explains June T. Smith. "We're starting cross-training to help everyone see the whole. Our goal is to reach the point where families can enter through any door and find out about services/resources they need and want, both formal and informal ones. Continuing with the quilt analogy, it's as if we're adding the backing to secure all of the pieces into the whole. Once we get there—and it will take a long time and a lot of hard work—we'll have it."

Measuring impact: An ongoing process that is constantly being refined

Improving the lives of children and families requires an ongoing process, on all fronts. Because the factors that shape people's lives are so intertwined—for example, early care and education with family support with health with school success—creating change requires a coordinated effort and for the change-makers, a high degree of comfort with ambiguity. Rarely, if ever, can an item be crossed off the "to do" list and forgotten. More likely, when progress is made in an area, new goals and challenges are revealed that need to be addressed.

According to June T. Smith, "Measuring what we have accomplished here is not a

A System within A System: Creating a subsidy system that maximizes available subsidy dollars

In Region A, subsidy monies follow the child. For example, a teen mom can finish high school in one county, go to a community college in another, get a job, and regularly receive a subsidy. She's never aware of the blended funding streams she is tapping into. She does not have to go from agency to agency to access all of them.

How does this happen? The seven Directors of the Department of Social Services in the region have pooled their administrative and service funds and turned the running of the subsidy system over to a regional nonprofit agency, Southwestern Child Development Commission (SWCDC). When a family is deemed income-eligible for subsidized child care, the Division of Child Development pays SWCDC, which in turn reimburses the center where the child is enrolled. In addition to these division monies, SWCDC has merged other subsidy streams including community college, mental health, and Smart Start subsidy money. This blending of funding allows subsidy monies to serve more children than any of the streams could do alone. Smart Start funding has also been used to expand staffing of parent counselors and social workers in order to serve families more effectively and efficiently. In addition, the quality enhancement monies discussed earlier are tied to subsidized children. This has the dual impact of opening up more quality programs for poor families while raising the level of care they receive.

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simple story of: We began at Point A and are now at Point B heading for C. I wish it were. But imagine if you won the lottery and had to decide how to spend all the money within a week. That's how it was for the region when we got Smart Start. Our board wasn't willing to spend money or time on gathering baseline data when there were children out there needing services. When we started, no one was talking about outcome measures. We just jumped in and started doing what we knew from research and other's experience would work. More recently, however, we have been gathering the baseline data and evaluating our programs so that we know what works best in Region A. That way we can do more of it."

Region A's data collection and evaluation process has become more refined as the Partnership has evolved as an organization. There is now an ongoing internal evaluation in place that includes on-site programmatic and fiscal monitoring of projects. Contractors submit quarterly reports to record their outputs and progress towards outcomes. A staff evaluator customizes the data collected from these reports and sends it on to the University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Institute as part of the statewide evaluation of Smart Start. In addition, Region A has contracted with an outside evaluator, Praxis Research, Inc., to measure the partnership's impact in its current four year plan and to study the effect of participation in Smart Start's programs on children's school success at the end of 3rd grade.

"We're Here for the Long Haul"

Change takes time. Yet, naturally for the first four to five years of Smart Start, there was concern over whether individual counties were getting their fair share. "'Balance over time' is a concept I emphasize often," says June T. Smith. "At the beginning if we could afford, say, one MTI photo screener for vision screening, everyone wanted it. Everyone was afraid Smart Start might end and they would never get one. Now we've reached the point where we've been at this long enough that people can trust that their needs and the needs of their counties will be met. Now we are all in it together for the long haul."

Ensuring Lasting Change

As Region A moves ahead today, it is taking steps to ensure that the changes it puts in place will last. These include:

- *Value collaborative leadership among board and staff.* "The dominant force that has kept us together and on the same paths has been the spirit of collaboration that we embraced in our formative months and have not let go of," emphasizes June T. Smith. "It is this spirit that has most changed us individually and determined who we are as an organization. Our accomplishments to date reflect that when people of good faith come together willingly and respectfully and openly share their knowledge and expertise in pursuit of mutual goals, the outcomes can be phenomenal."

- *Use Smart Start money as seed money to bring people to the table to share dreams and resources.* "We were elated when we got $1,200,000 for the first year. We realized if we spent all the money, it would be gone. Instead we invested part of it to hire good staff so we could go for the really big bucks, bring people together and do

even more," explains Lee Crites. "Our Smart Start dollars allow us to leverage many more dollars to get a job done," adds June T. Smith.

- *Take advantage of people's strengths.* Howard Hill, Board Treasurer, explains, "Some people are pushers, some pullers. Some create visions, others implement them. Some answer questions, I ask them. We've learned to build on our strengths and to see that each of us is part of something bigger."

- *Make a connection between people and what really matters to them.* Janice Edgerton, Partnership Project Manager, explains, "A lot of people feel removed from children. They don't see the link between caring for children and families and their world. We try to find a hook that engages people on a personal level. We make a case for how Smart Start promotes success in schools, prevents drop outs, increases literacy, promotes positive race relations... The point is to find a personal hook. The message has to be, 'What are you passionate about? We can make a connection.' Instead of 'We're passionate about this. Come join us.' "

- *Bring in outside evaluators.* Outside evaluators have helped the Partnership keep track of the big picture and avoid falling into the trap of creating programs for their own sake.

- *Hire strong partnership staff.* According to Gene Perotta, "As our partnership and board change and grow over the years, the importance of strong partnership staff increases. They have their eyes on the whole of what we are trying to do and we rely on them to help us keep track of where we've been, where we are, and where we are going."

And finally:

- *Be open to possibilities.* "I've worked in systems filled with hopelessness, " explains Janice Edgerton. "People's attitudes can make it impossible to carry out a creative idea. Here we have faith to say, 'I don't know how this is going to work, but I know it has to and we'll figure out how to make it work.'"

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Closing Thoughts

As we have seen, how to successfully create positive change for children and families is not a mystery. Rather it requires on-going hard work, focused on turning dreams of what might be one day into what is. It is work that takes commitment and dedication to process and to building respectful, collaborative, learning partnerships with community leaders and citizens from all walks of life. While creating these partnerships can at times be an initiative's greatest challenge, they are what hold together and nourish each of the successful change efforts we have seen in this monograph.

In communities across the country, people are coming together with the goal of systemically improving the lives of children and families. Thanks to Smart Start, no one has to start from scratch and no one has to go it alone. "By sharing our stories of Smart Start in this monograph and other Smart Start publications, we hope to contribute to a growing collection of stories about creating community change as told by the change-makers," says Karen Ponder, executive director of the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

As you probably noted, each of these partnerships is very different in terms of geography, resources, history, culture, and approach. Despite their diversity, there are common threads that run through their experiences and that have been essential to their success today. The key ones that we hope you'll consider in developing your own community initiative are:

Take a systemic approach. Be aware of and articulate connections. Henrietta Zalkind thinks of a system as a mobile. When you pull on one piece, they all move. Pauline McKee describes how in Randolph County, they see their work as alive and dynamic, each piece connected, and use what is learned to redirect strategic planning to meet the needs of children, families and communities. June T. Smith likens Region A's system to a quilt. The child is in the center. Together, Region A sews on pieces—some big, some little—fitting them together, filling in the holes, to keep the child warm, secure and nurtured.

See and articulate the connection between a change initiative for children and families and a positive future. Young children are the future. Reid Pollard reminds us that we need an educated workforce—in North Carolina and across the country—and that education begins when a parent starts reading to a baby in a cradle. Supporting that child and family begins with Smart Start and similar early childhood initiatives.

Help people see a personal connection between an initiative and what really matters to them. People are busy with many demands on their time and energy. By finding a hook that engages people on a personal level, you help ensure their continuing passion and commitment to an initiative.

Bring stakeholders to the table. Each of these partnerships has brought a wide range of people to the table to share dreams and resources. These people know about and understand the issues and formed the core of support for change.

Get buy-in and support for change from community leaders at the local level where people face the problems you are addressing every day. As Theresa Shaw reminds us, "You have to bring everyone with you as you solve problems and create change—even if you get to where you are going a little slower or things don't end up the way you had thought."

Value collaborative leadership. June T. Smith attributes Region A's accomplishments to people coming together willingly and respectfully and openly sharing their knowledge and expertise in pursuit of mutual goals.

Respect process. Remember change takes time. Not being chosen for Smart Start the first round turned out to be a benefit for DEPC. Randolph County moved to its own drummer and that has turned out to be in large part responsible for its remarkable progress in a short amount of time.

Build on strengths. Each of the people and communities described in this monograph has strengths. The same is true of the people and community involved in your initiative. By identifying and building on strengths, you create a strong, long lasting foundation for effecting change.

Create a learning community. Learning is valued by each of these three partnerships. The reason: an initiative where people are willing to question and to learn from experience, each other, and other initiatives sets a context for on-going development, good decision-making and lasting change.

Create community leaders. DEPC's Community Fellows Program is a solid model for developing a new generation of leaders.

Hire a leader who is a community problem-solver. Be willing to pay for an experienced manager. Initiatives focusing on children and families often make the mistake of choosing leaders based solely on their knowledge and skills in the areas of early childhood and/or family support. While it is important that some people involved have this knowledge and skills, it can be seen in the stories of these three partnerships that an initiative benefits from a leader who brings other skills including management, facilitation and problem solving.

Turn evaluation into a learning tool. Through its planning process and evaluation report forms, Randolph County clearly incorporates evaluation into the partnership's ongoing planning process. By shifting the focus from monitoring to learning, evaluation contributes to reaching the partnership's goal of creating a culture of learning.

Think creatively. Avoid the limits of linear thinking. Be open to possibilities.

And finally:

Build on others' experiences, their successes and their lessons learned. Each individual you have met in these pages, each partnership is part of something bigger. As Karen Ponder says, "By sharing our stories—of our successes and challenges here in North Carolina and across the country we can learn from each other and achieve more than any of us could on our own."

The stories in this monograph reflect these strategies to create lasting change. As you have read, these strategies are based on real-life experiences here in North Carolina through Smart Start. Most importantly, these are not isolated tasks to complete and cross off a "to do" list. Each is an ongoing thread woven into an initiative's everyday life. All are grounded by a vision, a community's assets and strong leadership. All are a necessary part of a successful change initiative.

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Smart Start Publications and Products

Monographs

- *Getting Started: How Smart Start Began*
- *What is Smart Start?*
- *Smart Start in Action: Stories of Success from Three Communities*

Tool Kit Series: a collection of technical assistance-related notebooks organized around seven broad topic areas related to Smart Start.

- *Child Care*
- *Health Support*
- *Family Support and Involvement*
- *Needs and Resource Assessments*
- *Evaluation*
- *Fiscal and Contracts Management*
- *Planning*

Effective Practice Series

- *Family Resource Centers: Strategies to Empower Families*
- *Child Care Quality Enhancement: An Overview*
- *The Medical Home: Every child Deserves One!*
- *School Readiness: Starting Your Child Off Right*
- *Kindergarten Transitions: What Every Pre-K Teacher Should Know*
- *What it Takes to Support Readiness: Building Collaborative Partnerships*
- *Planning and Funding Early Intervention Services at the Community Level*
- *Family Support: A Solid Foundation for Children*
- *Creating a Successful Child Care Substitute Program*

Other Publications

- *Financing Early Care and Education in NC*: an overview of financing for early care and education.
- *Sharing the Stories – Lessons Learned from 5 Years of Smart Start*: an inside look at the implementation of Smart Start.
- *Children's Outdoor Environments: A Guide to Outdoor Play and Learning*: a comprehensive resource for assisting in the development of outdoor environments in child care programs.
- *Legislative Advocacy Workbook*: offers advice and insight into the legislative process and the most effective way to communicate your message to your elected leaders.
- *NC School Readiness Task Force Report*: establishes the guidelines for "what it means for children to be ready for school" and "what it means for schools to be ready for children?"
- *NC's Kindergartners & Schools: Report on the School Readiness Pilot Assessment*: summarizes the initial findings in NC's first school readiness assessment of kindergartners and schools.
- *Smart Start Evaluation Notebook*: a reference tool on Smart Start evaluation at the local level.
- *Smart Start Outreach and Public Information Resource Guide*: resources and samples on public outreach and media.

Videos

- *What is Smart Start*: a 7-minute video which provides an overview on the Smart Start Initiative.
- *Smart Start Documentary*: a 30-minute show which looks closely at how Smart Start is making a difference in the lives of children and families. Produced by WRAL-TV.

Web-Based Resources

- *National Smart.Net Membership*: through your one-year membership, you will receive password-protected online access to the many resources available through Smart Start including online copies of most publications.

To order any of the publications or products above, visit www.ncsmartstart.org/Information/orderform.htm or request an order form from order@smartstart-nc.org or call 919-821-7999.

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